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THE GREAT COURSES®

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A History of European Art

Taught by: Professor William Kloss, Independent Art Historian,
The Smithsonian Associates, Smithsonian Institution

Part 2

Course Guidebook



THE TEACHING COMPANY®

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Professor Kloss is an independent art historian and scholar who lectures and writes about a wide range of European and American art. He was educated at Oberlin College, where he earned a B.A. in English and an M.A. in Art History.

Professor Kloss continued his postgraduate work at the University of Michigan, where he held a teaching fellowship. He was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship for two years of study in Rome and was an assistant professor of art history at the University of Virginia, where he taught 17th - and 18th -century European art and 19th -century French art. His courses were very highly rated by both undergraduate and graduate students.

A resident of Washington, DC, Professor Kloss has enjoyed a long association with the Smithsonian Institution as an independent lecturer for the seminar and travel program, presenting more than 100 courses in the United States and abroad on subjects ranging from ancient Greek art to Impressionism. He has also been a featured lecturer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation and for The Art Institute of Chicago. He is a guest faculty lecturer for the American Arts Course, Sotheby's Institute.

Professor Kloss serves on the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, a presidential appointment he has held since 1990. He is the author of several books, including *Art in the White House: A Nation's Pride*, and most recently, co-author of *United States Senate Catalogue of Fine Art*. He has also written articles published in *Winterthur Portfolio*, *Antiques*, *American Art Quarterly*, and *Antiques & Fine Art* and is the lecturer for The Teaching Company's course *Great Artists of the Italian Renaissance*.

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A History of European Art

Scope:

In this course, we'll survey the great monuments of European painting, sculpture, and architecture from the age of Charlemagne to the onset of World War II. We'll spend time together examining major works by the greatest visual artists of a millennium of Western civilization, including extensive considerations of such important artists as Giotto, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Monet. We'll place these artists and their masterpieces in the political, religious, and social context of their time, so that we have a more profound understanding of both why an artwork was created and how it responded to a particular set of historical circumstances. In the course of this survey, we'll witness the birth and fruition of a brilliant European civilization, emerging from the shadow of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages to become one of the most dominant cultural forces in history.

In Lecture One, we'll set the stage for our survey by providing a chronological overview of the course. I'll also introduce the five essential aspects in the analysis of works of art: subject, interpretation, style, context, and emotion. An appreciation of each of these individual elements is crucial to our understanding of artists and their works. In the first lecture, we'll illustrate this approach by analyzing several representative masterpieces. Throughout the course, we'll employ these key elements to look at paintings, sculpture, and prints. We'll also identify and define the five areas of subject matter that constitute the major categories of art: narrative or historical art, portraiture, landscape, still life, and scenes of daily life. During the survey, we will see how each era emphasized certain subjects in art to communicate important societal and political ideas and values. Throughout the survey, one of our goals will be to learn to take *time* with art—to look at it, consider it, and feel it without haste—in the hopes that an understanding of art can change and enhance our lives.

In Lectures Two through Ten we'll explore the artistic output of the Middle Ages, from the early architectural monuments of the Carolingian Empire to the massive cathedrals and exquisite sculpture of the French Gothic style. Despite its former reputation, this was a period of great creativity and provides a necessary background to our extensive consideration of the achievements of the Renaissance that followed. We will spend a significant amount of time, Lectures Eleven through Twenty-Seven, examining the early development and the blossoming of the Renaissance in both Italy and the north. The Renaissance was both a rebirth of interest in Classical literature and art and a revival of interest in learning that, together, led to a reevaluation of man's place in the world. We will discuss the place of Humanism and Neo-Platonic philosophy in the Renaissance—both of which were reflected in different styles in art of the period. We will note how the conceptual advances of the time, beginning with Giotto's approach to the illusionistic creation of space, led to a revolution in the

expressive possibilities of narrative art. We'll trace this accomplishment through the works of some of the greatest artists in history, from Masaccio and Donatello, at the outset of the 15th century, to the acknowledged geniuses of the High Renaissance, including Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, Bellini, and Titian. We'll also discuss the tremendous innovations in Renaissance architecture, from Brunelleschi's dome for the cathedral in Florence to the creation of the new Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome in the High Renaissance. We will also address the Renaissance in the north, with considerations of the art of Jan van Eyck, Dürer, Bosch, and Bruegel, among many other important masters.

In Lectures Twenty-Eight through Thirty-Eight, we'll commence with a discussion of the evolution of Baroque style in the art of Caravaggio and the Bolognese Carracci family. We'll spend a substantial amount of time examining the presiding genius of the time in Rome, the sculptor and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini. We'll continue from Italy to a broader view of European Baroque art, from Velázquez in Spain to Rubens and Rembrandt in the Netherlands, to Versailles and the court of Louis XIV in France. Not only will we discuss the major masters of the era, but we'll spend time on many of the extraordinary yet lesser known geniuses of the period. I'll then discuss the 18th-century reactions to the Baroque by introducing the Rococo style of Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard. It is at this time that we will see the nations of Europe becoming increasingly politically and culturally unified, sharing an artistic language expressed in the varying accents of Italy, Spain, Holland, Belgium, and France.

Finally, in Lectures Thirty-Nine through Forty-Eight, we'll examine the beginnings of modern European art with the Neoclassical movement of the late 18th century. We'll discuss the work of David that defined the Neoclassical style, and we will detail the work of the great Romantic artists Goya, Géricault, and Delacroix. We'll see how the Neoclassical and Romantic art of the early 19th century gave way to the Realism of Courbet and Manet, which in turn, led to the Impressionist achievements of Degas and Monet. We'll have the opportunity to discuss the reactions to Impressionism embodied in the work of Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Seurat and reserve time to discuss the seminal contributions of Cézanne and Rodin to the art of the 20th century. As we move into the new century, we again see a period of internationalism in art, as well as a greater variety of artistic styles and movements, all of which responded to, were conditioned by, or were created by the events leading up to World War I. We'll conclude with a consideration of the early movements of the century, including Fauvism, Cubism, German Expressionism, Dada, and Surrealism, and the pivotal role of the two towering geniuses of early modern art, Picasso and Matisse.

Lecture Thirteen

Masaccio and Early Renaissance Painting

Scope: Returning to painting, we continue our study of Renaissance art, looking at works that feature the inclusion of architectural precepts, such as Brunelleschi's linear perspective method. This lecture focuses on Masaccio, although it pays tribute to his predecessors, including Giotto and Masolino. Our primary example of Masaccio's work is the Brancacci Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. We'll explore his original depictions of various religious subjects. Finally, we'll discuss his fresco *The Trinity*, a work that translates rational and irrational space into a depiction of a complex theological concept.

Outline

- I. Tommaso de Ser Giovanni (1401–1428)—nicknamed Masaccio, from *Maso* meaning “Tom” and *accio* meaning “ungainly” or “large”—was born in a village near Florence on the Arno River.
 - A. At 20, he enrolled in the Guild of St. Luke's, the painter's guild in Florence. In 1425, he was hired to work with the painter Masolino, who had already begun to decorate a chapel in the Florentine church of Santa Maria del Carmine. The Brancacci family chapel became Masaccio's most famous work and one of the highpoints of Italian and European painting.
 - B. Soon after he began work on the Brancacci Chapel, he was asked to paint a polyptych in Pisa for the Church of the Carmine. There may have been a connection between the two churches, because Masaccio was permitted to take the new commission. This altarpiece was later dismembered and sold in pieces.
 - C. Our example shows a part of this altarpiece, the *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (1426). This painting is monumental and deeply affecting despite its damaged state. The deep blue of the Madonna's robe is preserved. Note that the Christ Child is putting grapes in his mouth. These symbolize wine, which in turn, signifies Christ's blood and the Eucharist. Note also the base, the design of which was borrowed from Roman sarcophagi.
 - D. Compare this work to Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* (c. 1310), done more than a century earlier. The deep humanity that Giotto expressed at the beginning of the Trecento was reborn in Masaccio's painting.
- II. Our next example shows the Brancacci Chapel (1425–1427, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence) from the right transept.

- A. The walls of the Brancacci Chapel are divided into two tiers, which are then subdivided into narrative fields. There are two small and two large scenes on each of the side walls and two scenes on each side of the altar on the end wall. Over the altar is a Tuscan painting in an Italo-Byzantine style, *Madonna del Carmine* (c. 1250).
- B. The subject of the cycle is the life of St. Peter. Peter, who was the first pope, was symbolically associated with the papal party, dominant in Florence at the time. The constant struggle during these decades between the two political powers—the Guelphs and the Ghibellines—is famous in late medieval and early Renaissance history. Significantly, this family chapel was founded in the late 14th century by Piero (Peter) Brancacci and dedicated to his patron saint, Peter.
- C. Masolino was joined in decorating the chapel by Masaccio. Masolino painted the vault, paintings that were destroyed and later replaced by 18th-century works, and three other scenes before leaving for work abroad. Masaccio stayed on, painting five and a half scenes before leaving for Rome. The Brancacci patron was sent into political exile, and the chapel remained unfinished for 60 years, until around 1484, when Filippino Lippi was hired to complete the remaining three and a half scenes.
- D. Our example shows a view of the right wall worked on by Masolino (upper wall) and Filippino Lippi (lower wall). Masolino's *St. Peter Healing a Cripple* (left) and the *Raising of Tabitha* (right) form a simultaneous narrative, both involving St. Peter in the act of healing. Note the marvelous view of daily urban life and the elegantly dressed gentlemen at center—the Brancacci were in the silk trade.
- E. Masolino and Masaccio appear to have worked well together in the chapel, and the two may have already collaborated in 1424 on another altarpiece. Masaccio's painting was bolder and broader than Masolino's, which reflected the International style that was still very much in vogue.
 1. Masolino's *Temptation of Adam and Eve* is representative of the International Gothic style. It is an elegant painting, although the figures are bland.
 2. Directly opposite Masolino's *Temptation* is Masaccio's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve*. The contrast is remarkable, stylistically and emotionally. The *Expulsion* was painted with great speed and freedom. Masaccio completed it in just four days, with one day each spent on the angel, Adam, Eve, and the gate.
- F. On the left wall of the chapel is the largest painting by Masaccio, *The Tribute Money*. This unusual subject tells a story from the Gospel of St. Matthew (17:24–27). While Jesus and his disciples were in Capernaum, a tax collector demanded that they pay the local temple tax. Peter was

angry, but Jesus told him to go to the lake and retrieve a fish that held a gold coin in its mouth. Peter then paid the tax collector.

1. In the center group are Jesus, the tax collector, and Peter. The painting tells the story in a three-part composition within a continuous landscape.
 2. The subject must have been chosen because the chapel was dedicated to Peter. It could also be related to the imposition of a recent tax for defense against invading armies.
 3. Note the center group—the powerful faces and figures are reminiscent of ancient Roman art and Giotto's art.
 4. Compare this work with Giotto's *Capture of Christ* (c. 1305, Arena Chapel).
- G. One of Masaccio's three scenes on the altar wall includes the *Baptism of the Neophytes* (upper tier to the right of the altar). This scene is from the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter preached in Jerusalem and 3,000 people were converted and baptized.
1. The scene's three male nude figures are typically Renaissance.
 2. Note the mountains and the sensation of cold.
- H. Another one of Masaccio's scenes on the altar wall is *St. Peter Healing with His Shadow* (lower wall to the left of the altar). It is drawn from Acts 5:12–14, where we read that believers "brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, at the least, the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." Inspired by this passage, Masaccio invented this scene.
- I. Not since Giotto painted in the Arena Chapel had any fresco cycle deserved to be called monumental, though some were larger or more ambitious. In the wake of stylistic reversals of the late 14th century, Masaccio revived Giotto's powerful figure style. However, Masaccio's figures move with greater naturalness, a potential that was inspired by Renaissance Humanism.
- III. Our next image shows Masaccio's *The Trinity* (c. 1428, Santa Maria Novella), an extraordinary fresco in the left-side aisle of the church. It was probably painted shortly before the artist's departure for Rome. The fresco, nearly 22 feet high, consists of an elaborate fictive architectural setting, similar to an elevated chapel. Everything is governed by a perspective system presumed to have been invented by Brunelleschi.
- A. *One-point perspective* is also called *scientific* or *mathematical perspective*. It is a formula for constructing pictorial space in which apparently three-dimensional figures or buildings seem to be situated as they are in reality. The picture space may be thought of as an extension of the real world or as a separate world, depending on how the system is applied.

- B.** The perspective system is also applied to each of the figures and objects in a technique called *foreshortening*. Because this illusion of space is constructed with lines, the system is called *linear perspective*.
1. An example would be a painting of a large room with a tiled floor, in which the horizontal lines parallel to the picture plane intersect with diagonal lines. The diagonals recede into the picture space in the way parallel lines in the real world, such as railroad tracks, are perceived by our eyes as if they were converging in the distance.
 2. The point at which the diagonals meet is called the *vanishing point* and is located on the horizon line, usually near the center of the picture. Because this point is aligned with our viewpoint, the picture space can seem like an extension of our space.
 3. Leon Battista Alberti first published an explanation of this system in 1435. He used a helpful analogy—that the painted picture surface was like a window.
- C.** In his fresco *The Trinity*, Masaccio applied the principles of perspective brilliantly. Perhaps Brunelleschi was associated with the planning of the composition and spatial illusion.
1. Above the tomb are two figures kneeling outside of the architectural chapel. It appears that there are two tall pilasters with columns, an architrave, a red arch, and a barrel vault.
 2. Six figures, the patron and his wife, the Virgin Mary, St. John, Jesus, and God the Father, are pictured. Although the other figures are depicted in rational space, God is depicted non-rationally within that illusionistic space.
 3. Note the composition of the interlocking pyramids, one from the two donors' base to the head of God and one created by the convergence of the vault's receding diagonals at a point near the bottom of the cross—a point exactly at eye level for an average person. The intersection of the two pyramids—two triangles—is in the body of the crucified Christ.
- D.** The concept of the Trinity—three in one, one in three—is a central tenet of Catholicism that has been debated for centuries. However, Masaccio has conceived and achieved a powerful pictorial comprehension of this intellectual, emotional, and theological concept.
- E.** In 1428, having completed *The Trinity* fresco in Santa Maria Novella, Masaccio left for Rome, summoned to another project. Surely he intended to return to Florence to complete the frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, but he died in Rome in 1428 at age 26. Despite his short life, he changed the course of Western European art forever.

Works Discussed:

Masaccio:

Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1426, tempera on panel, 53 ¼ x 28 ¾" (135.5 x 73 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Expulsion of Adam and Eve, The Tribute Money, Baptism of the Neophytes, St. Peter Healing with His Shadow, c. 1425–28, fresco, Brancacci Chapel, Church of Sta. Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy.

The Trinity, c. 1428, fresco, 22' x 10' 5" (6.4 x 3.2 m), Church of Sta. Maria Novella, Florence, Italy.

Masolino:

St. Peter Healing a Cripple, Raising of Tabitha, and Temptation of Adam and Eve, c. 1424–25, fresco, Brancacci Chapel, Church of Sta. Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy.

Further Reading:

Ornella Casazza, *Masaccio and the Brancacci Chapel*.

Diane Cole Ahl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Masaccio*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How did the introduction of one-point perspective change painting?
2. Does Masaccio's *Trinity* fresco successfully depict the concept he was trying to express? Think about verbal versus pictorial representation.

Lecture Fourteen

Jan van Eyck and Northern Renaissance Art

Scope: We now return to northern Europe, which we last visited when we looked at Gothic art outside of France around the year 1300. In this lecture, we will focus on Jan van Eyck, one of the most famous artists in history. We will discuss two of his works, the *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait* and the *Ghent Altarpiece* in the Church of San Bavo. Both of these works display Renaissance elements that were developing at the time. In addition, we will note some of the differences between the Italian Renaissance and the Northern Renaissance.

Outline

- I. The duchy of Burgundy was identical with the geographic area called the Netherlands, and its political power and independence were supported by a prosperous economy based on production and trade. Its proximity to England, roads into the continent, and access to water routes gave it an excellent trading position. The dukes of Burgundy and the city governments were careful to control all aspects of production and trade through guilds.
 - A. Burgundy was roughly equal to the area of modern Belgium, whereas Flanders was a more narrowly defined territory. The modern kingdom of the Netherlands was in the northernmost part of Burgundy and played a relatively small role in the economy and art of the 15th century. Many names have been used to describe this region and its culture, but whether we call it Burgundy or Belgium or speak of Flemish or Netherlandish art is irrelevant as long as we keep chronology in mind.
 - B. Art in the Netherlands in the 15th century went hand-in-hand with economic and political factors, and the production of and trade in art benefited greatly from politics. Undeniably, northern Europeans shared the curiosity and sense of discovery that characterized the Italian Renaissance. That included an interest in the observable physical appearance of the world and the place of humans in that world. This, rather than stylistic considerations or an interest in antiquity, is what justifies speaking of a Northern Renaissance.
- II. Jan van Eyck (c. 1390–1441) is one of the most famous artists of the Northern Renaissance, often thought of as the “inventor” of oil painting. Van Eyck served as a diplomat and painter, and his art was known and collected throughout Europe. Although he actually did not invent oil painting, he employed it with great skill.
 - A. *Oil painting* is the medium in which pigments are suspended in linseed or walnut oil. This method was widely used in the southern Netherlands when van Eyck began to paint. It is a slow-drying medium but durable

when dry. The artist is able to paint more slowly, add detail more easily than when working in tempera or fresco, and render changes invisible. Oil painting also offers transparency and brilliant color. The effects of light and shade, reflection and atmosphere, gave the artist more possibilities than in tempera painting and created a greater illusion of realism.

- B. Our example shows van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait* (c. 1434). We see a man and a woman in a bedchamber with a dog at their feet. Their size is relatively large, but they are not looking at us. The room is lit by a window at the left; light glides across the back wall to the bed at right, and the couple is lit by an unseen source.
 - C. Some 90 years ago, a critic observed that in its color effect, this and other paintings by van Eyck showed the same characteristics as Rembrandt’s paintings. They are warm and golden, with a darkness that glows with color. This is made possible by the oil medium, but it is a measure of van Eyck’s genius that he could use the medium at a level that could be compared with Rembrandt’s painting of two centuries later.
 - D. The painting has long been called the *Arnolfini Wedding* or *Marriage*, but the idea that it represents a wedding, which evolved in the 16th century, is much disputed. The couple is almost certainly Giovanni Arnolfini, an Italian merchant in the Netherlands, and his wife, Giovanna Cenami. The scholar Erwin Panofsky tried to demonstrate that this was a private marriage ceremony. It was unnecessary to have either a priest or a civil authority for a valid marriage, but there are two witnesses reflected in the convex mirror. One is the painter, who also signed the painting above the mirror: “Jan van Eyck was here, 1434.” In Panofsky’s view, the painting serves as a kind of marriage certificate.
 - E. There are many symbols that could support the idea of a marriage, but they also can support the view that the painting is a symbol of the close relationship of the couple. The dog symbolizes fidelity, shoes removed allude to sanctity, the spotless mirror equals purity, a single burning candle implies matrimony and unity, and the fruit on the windowsill could indicate innocence before the Fall.
 - F. The mood of the painting sanctifies the marriage, whether it is the actual ceremony or the continuity of married life. Every object and person in the painting is studied by the artist with the idea that they are worthy of scrutiny, because the visible world was symbolic of the invisible, higher reality.
- III. Our next image shows another van Eyck work, the *Ghent Altarpiece* (c. 1432), a polyptych painted in oil. This is the greatest monument of early Flemish painting. The principal subject is the *Adoration of the Lamb*. Today the *Ghent Altarpiece* is not continually opened and closed, but all its panels

are arranged to be visible to the visitor. Originally, it would most often have been closed, as seen here.

- A. At the top, two prophets flank two sibyls, pagan women who were believed to have prophesized the coming of Christ. In the middle tier is the *Annunciation*, and on the bottom tier, the donors flank what appear to be two sculptures of saints.
- B. Though we say that this altarpiece was painted by Jan van Eyck, the inscription seems to credit Hubert van Eyck, Jan's brother, as principal painter. However, we know virtually nothing about Hubert beyond this inscription, and usually only God, the Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist on the interior are assumed to be his, because their style and scale are different. One widely accepted theory is that Jan honored his deceased brother by placing his name first on the altarpiece, which Hubert may have begun as early as 1420, but which Jan finished after his death.
- C. This altarpiece was for the donors' chapel in the crypt below the choir, and it was moved up to a chapel in the ambulatory behind the choir in the 16th century. In recent years, it has been transferred to a new room constructed at the front of the nave where visitors can see it without disrupting services.
- D. Our next image shows a detail of the donors with St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. The donors were Jodocus Vyd and his wife, Isabel Borluut. The passage is a striking example of the descriptive realism of Netherlandish portraiture in the 15th century. Like Enrico Scrovegni and the Arena Chapel, it seems that this couple had a particular reason to commission this altarpiece and offer money to the church—to redeem the family name. Jodocus was the son of the treasurer of the duke of Burgundy, and his father was imprisoned for theft.
- E. Altarpieces in northern Europe were often dominated by sculpture, or painting shared the space with sculpture, to a much greater degree than in Italy. Many altarpieces had wooden sculpture because of the great forests in the region. Marble sculpture was less common. Imitated marble sculpture was sometimes introduced into illusionistic niches, as van Eyck has done here.
- F. The second middle level contains the central image of the exterior of the altarpiece with the *Annunciation*. The Archangel Gabriel is at the left, and the Virgin Mary is on the right. The drapery is sharply sculptural but is given the warm tone of muslin, as the figures themselves are rendered in flesh tones.
 - 1. As in Simone Martini's *Annunciation*, Gabriel's spoken words are printed out here, in Gothic script, *Ave gratia plena* ("Hail thou that art full of grace"). Words also proceed from Mary's head, *ecce*

ancilla ("Behold the handmaid of the Lord"). These words are inscribed upside down so that they may be read not by the viewer but by God! The dove of the Holy Spirit above Mary's head marks the conception of Jesus.

- 2. Mary's side of the painting contains a niche in a wall that houses a *lavabo* (a hand-washing dish), a pitcher, and a white towel, each signifying purity and virginity. Above the pitcher is a trefoil window, the three circles symbolizing the Trinity.
- IV. When the *Ghent Altarpiece* wings are folded outward to reveal the interior, we see that the space is divided into two levels.
- A. The upper level shows the three huge figures thought to be painted by Hubert van Eyck: God the Father, flanked by Mary and St. John the Baptist. This central trio is flanked by two panels painted with groups of musical angels. The figures of Adam on the left and Eve on the right close the sequence. The lower level shows a large multi-figure composition, the thematic focus of the altarpiece, the *Adoration of the Lamb*. There is a pair of panels on each side, and as with the *Annunciation* on the outside, the entire space is represented as continuous.
 - B. Adam and Eve, shown after the Fall, represent sinful mankind, and they look toward the enthroned Lord, flanked by Mary and John, who in Catholic theology, are intercessors on behalf of mankind. Mary is also considered a second Eve, redeeming Eve's original sin.
 - 1. Adam is a bearded, full-length nude with detailed anatomy, though covered with a fig leaf. Above the small arch with his name is a sculpture showing the sacrifices of Cain and Abel. Note that Adam's feet seem to be below the level of the frame; van Eyck has painted him in a foreshortened view as we see him from the floor level.
 - 2. Eve is holding a small golden fruit "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," not the traditional apple (which has no scriptural basis). Above her is a sculpture of Cain slaying Abel, the first murder following the revelation of good and evil to Eve and Adam.
 - 3. Adam and Eve are un-idealized, with a particular poignancy in their faces, in the curves of Eve's body, and in the musculature of Adam.
 - C. The center trio shows the Virgin Mary, God the Father, and St. John the Baptist. This hieratic presentation is close to a standard Byzantine composition. However, the figures do not show the careful observation in realistic representation that is characteristic of the rest of the altarpiece.
 - D. Between Eve and the Baptist is a smaller, arched panel dominated by an organ played by an angel in a brocaded robe. The faces of four other

musical angels are seen behind the organ. The nearest plays a viol while another plays a small harp. Musicians and instruments are well-represented in Netherlandish art of this period.

- E. On the left is a group of eight angelic singers behind an elaborate music stand. These are perhaps the only angels without wings in Netherlandish painting of the century. Compare them to Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria* in the Duomo in Florence.
- F. The lower half of the opened altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Lamb* has a landscape teeming with figures. This is flanked by groups on the left and the right. These groups have come to worship the Lamb; most of them belong to the community of saints.
 - 1. The left side depicts Christian knights led by St. George. Behind them are the Just Judges, which may refer to a specific group of dignitaries in Ghent. The original panel was stolen during World War II and has not been recovered.
 - 2. The right side presents the nearest group, Christian hermits. Behind them are pilgrims, led by the giant St. Christopher.
- G. The center panel and largest painting is the *Adoration of the Lamb*. Set in a remarkable landscape, it is as wide as the combined panels of Mary, God, and St. John above it. The title is sometimes given as *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* or *Sacred Lamb*. The Lamb is Jesus and represents sacrifice, the Mass, and the Eucharist. It derives from the Book of Revelation in the Bible, "in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain."
 - 1. The interior of the Ghent Altar may be called an *all-saints picture*, in which believing souls gather in worship. It has a pyramidal composition with an intuitive, not mathematical, perspective. Note the high horizon line.
 - 2. The large groups of figures converge on a central axis of a fountain in the foreground and an altar above it. At lower right are the dignitaries of the Church, including popes and bishops. On the left are gathered patriarchs, poets, and philosophers, mostly Old Testament characters. The fountain is the fountain of baptism, therefore redemption, the fountain of eternal life.
 - 3. Emerging from the foliage at left are confessors and martyrs, while the virgin martyrs are seen to the right. Note van Eyck's depictions of plants and other living things, which are accurate and highly detailed.
 - 4. The central act is simple, despite being clothed in symbolism. It is Christ in the guise of the Lamb, his blood pouring into a chalice offered by the Church.
 - 5. The landscape continues to *Heavenly Jerusalem*, with its richly detailed architecture. The landscape is contiguous with that of the central *Adoration*.

- 6. The beginnings of northern European painting are here, from the Naturalism of detail to the broad sweep of unifying landscape, from the preoccupation with Christian themes to the embracing of the Humanistic response to the world.

Works Discussed:

Jan van Eyck:

Arnolfini Wedding Portrait, 1434, oil on panel, 32 ¼ x 23 ½" (82.2 x 60 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Ghent Altarpiece, 1432, oil on panel, closed: 12 ½ x 8 ½' (3.5 x 2.2 m), open: 12 ½ x 17' (3.4 x 4.4 m), Cathedral of St. Bavo, Ghent, Belgium.

Further Reading:

Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in its Historical Context*.

James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. How does Jan van Eyck's work differ from the Italian Renaissance style we have examined in previous lectures?
- 2. How does the medium of oil painting differ from the use of tempera?

Lecture Fifteen

Northern Renaissance Altarpieces

Scope: Continuing our study of Northern Renaissance painting, we next look at five altarpieces and one portrait. We will see how three artists, Robert Campin, Rogier van der Weyden, and Hugo van der Goes, depicted religious subjects on their altarpieces. In addition, we will explore the expressive and stylistic range of northern painting, examine elements of symbolism, and relate advances in technique in these works.

Outline

- I. Robert Campin (c. 1375/80–1444) was one of the founders of Netherlandish painting.
 - A. Campin worked in Tournai, south of Bruges and Ghent, and his paintings often incorporate views of the town. Our first example is his oil-on-panel triptych of the *Annunciation*, picturing the donors and St. Joseph (c. 1425). This is sometimes referred to as the *Mérode Altarpiece* for the family that owned it for many years. It was commissioned around 1425 by a couple named Inghelbrechts in the city of Tournai. This portable altarpiece is only 25" x 46" when open.
 - B. On the left wing, the donors are seen kneeling in a small courtyard just outside a door that leads to the room in which the Annunciation unfolds. The woman was added, probably after the couple was married, since she is painted over the grass. A servant stands at the gate to the town; one historian has suggested that this is a self-portrait of Robert Campin.
 - C. On the central panel is the *Virgin of Humility*, who seems not to notice the angel who has come through the door. The *lavabo* and towel in the niche parallel those we saw in the Ghent Altar *Annunciation* and carry the same symbolic meaning. The lilies on the table also refer to Mary's virginity and the Incarnation.
 1. The Incarnation is imminent; a tiny figure carrying a miniature cross has entered the room through the glass window at the left, without breaking it, signifying the perpetual virginity of Mary.
 2. Everything in the room can be read symbolically, but we also are affected by its warmth. Although the angular drawing of the robes reflects the style of traditional Gothic art, the comfortable interior reflects a contemporary Flemish home and furnishings.
 - D. On the right wing is Joseph's workshop. He was a carpenter, and he is busily boring holes in a board, probably the top of a stool. The image also shows Joseph's mousetraps, which are meant to catch the devil—an analogy of St. Augustine's, in which the Incarnation was devised to

fool the devil, as mice are fooled by bait. One trap is shown on Joseph's work table and another on a ledge projecting from his window.

- E. Although this work is very small, the others that we will study are quite large. In all of them, the artists have lavished their attention on small details even while constructing larger forms. The ability to paint small details with compelling clarity is a mark of artistic genius, not just a technical accomplishment. When viewers look at these paintings closely, they are entering the painted world in an entirely new way—through the looking-glass into both the microcosm and the macrocosm of the world. Once immersed in the painted universe of the Flemish masters, you are launched on a fascinating voyage of visual and intellectual discovery. This can only happen completely in front of the *original* paintings.
- II. Our next image shows Rogier van der Weyden's *Deposition* (c. 1435). Rogier was the pupil of Robert Campin, but he was of a different temperament. This altarpiece is one of the most startlingly original of all Flemish paintings.
 - A. The body of Christ is lowered into the center of the picture, but the scene is not realistic. Set in a shallow, golden, box-like space rather than a landscape, it resembles a painted wooden sculpture.
 - B. This painting was above an altar. Therefore, the upward projection of the panel might have suggested the moment during the Mass when the priests elevate the Host, the wafer representing the body of Christ. Moreover, the nearly horizontal position of the body suggests a lowering of it onto the altar table.
 - C. Note the emotional significance of the 10 closely packed figures. St. John and Mary Magdalene bracket the scene. The cross is short and seems to grow from Christ's body. The colors are varied and intense. The detail shows the hands of Christ and the Virgin. The realism is intense, yet it is placed in an artificial situation, suggesting painted sculpture that has come to life.
 - D. The anguish in this painting is expressed in many subtle and vivid ways. St. Mary Magdalene displays a physical spasm of grief, while the female saint whose head is at the far left internalizes her grief. She almost presses it back into her head, but her head and neck cloth betray her emotions, made visible by the tightly pulled creases and knots.
 - E. This public altarpiece is also one of the most private, personal devotional pictures of the 15th century, a compelling response to intense contemplation.
 - III. A decade later, Rogier fulfilled a major commission for the Hôtel-Dieu ("hostel of God"), a hospital at Beaune, south of Dijon in present-day France. The building has survived, and its interior has been restored to a

semblance of its original appearance, but the altarpiece has been moved to another part of the monastery. Our illustration shows the courtyard at the hospital at Beaune.

A. The interior shows the main ward (*grand salle*), built from 1443–1451. Nicholas Rolin, the powerful chancellor of Burgundy under Duke Philip the Good, wanted to build a hospital for the poor. The plan was a response to a great famine in 1438–1439 which, together with epidemics, had devastated Burgundy. Rolin offered a detailed plan for the use, design, and equipping of the hospital, as well as for financing it in perpetuity. In 1442, the pope approved the plan and granted exemption from feudal taxation and the control of neighboring bishops.

B. Rogier's *Altarpiece of the Last Judgment* (c. 1445–1448) is on the exterior. When closed, the tall central section showed two fictive sculptures of the Annunciation at the top, with fictive sculptures of St. Sebastian and St. Anthony Abbot below. Both saints regularly were invoked for protection against the plague.

1. The flanking panels are portraits of Chancellor Rolin and his wife, Guigone de Salins. The hospital complex also was to serve as their funerary monument to secure the absolution of their sins, as an exchange of temporal goods for spiritual benefits.

2. This sober exterior, all imitation white marble and black robes, opens to an explosion of color and dramatic figures in the *Last Judgment*.

C. The *Last Judgment* in the interior has nine panels. Looking at the bottom of this painting, we see the dead arise from their earthly graves and head toward their eternal reward. The blessed are on Christ's right and the eternally damned are on Christ's left. Above them are the figures of the apostles, the Pope, Philip the Good, Rolin and his wife, the Virgin Mary, and St. John the Baptist.

1. In the tall center panel is Christ, enthroned on a rainbow, with St. Michael. In the small flanking panels are angels bearing the instruments of Christ's Passion. Christ dispenses final judgment with his gestures, while St. Michael weighs the souls to see how heavily their sins weigh upon them

2. One of the most magnificent figures in 15th-century painting is St. Michael. He is tall and elegant, a perfect vertical center pole for the altarpiece.

IV. Flemish painting includes many smaller and more direct works, such as van der Weyden's *Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1460).

V. Our next altarpiece is unusual because it was painted in the Netherlands for an Italian patron, then shipped to Florence for placement in the Church of Sant' Egidio at the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova about eight years after

completion. This work is Hugo van der Goes's *Portinari Altarpiece* (c. 1475–1476).

A. The patron was Tommaso Portinari, the head of the Medici bank in Bruges. Because this painting was intended to go to Italy, the figures are monumental or, to put it in other words, in their scale and proportions, they are more Italian than northern.

B. This work demonstrates that painstaking detail is also found in a large painting. The descriptive realism and atmospheric richness of the oil medium overwhelmed the Italian public and artists. The painting became one of the most influential foreign paintings in Florence in the Renaissance.

C. On the left wing are Tommaso Portinari, his sons, and their hieratic patron saints, with a rocky landscape behind them.

D. On the right wing are Portinari's wife, Maria Baroncelli, their daughter, and saints. The barren landscape brought a Flemish winter to Florence.

E. The *Adoration of the Shepherds* shows un-idealized shepherds with Naturalistic details that had an immediate impact on Florentine artists. Everyone is seen adoring the child—Joseph, Mary, and the angels. The child is not in a manger but on the bare floor, with only his own radiance to support him.

1. This scene is also symbolic. Note the angel with the priest's vestment, on the edge of which is embroidered the words *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*. In a variation on similar sacramental paintings, the infant is on the ground among the adoring throng. Everything points to an embodiment of the mystery of transubstantiation, which is the Mass.

2. This painting was displayed above the high altar of St. Egidius. The still life of flowers in the foreground would have been at eye level, its compelling realism pulling the viewer into the painting just in front of the Christ Child.

VI. Shortly after painting the *Portinari Altarpiece*, van der Goes painted another remarkable altarpiece with the same subject, the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (c. 1480). We will not dwell on this painting, but we should note how different it is in conception.

A. The wide, low format compels the shepherds to bend over as they rush into the stable, forcing them to kneel like Joseph and Mary.

B. The subject is treated almost like a vision, as two prophets draw back curtains on either side. One looks directly at us with a tragic expression as they invite us to witness and even to kneel ourselves.

C. The intensity of van der Goes's paintings was undoubtedly related to his inner life. His emotional equilibrium was uncertain. Like another artist from the Netherlands 400 years later, Vincent Van Gogh, he was

often on the psychological brink. He died in a monastery after mental collapse and attempted suicide. But he left us paintings that instill a sense of awe—in believer and nonbeliever—in the presence of the divine mysteries.

Works Discussed:

Robert Campin:

The Annunciation Triptych (Mérode Triptych), c. 1425, oil on wood, overall (open): 25 3/8 x 46 3/8" (64.5 x 117.8 cm), central panel: 25 1/4 x 24 7/8" (64.1 x 63.2 cm), each wing: 25 3/8 x 10 3/4" (64.5 x 27.3 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, New York City, New York, USA.

Rogier van der Weyden:

Deposition, c. 1435, oil on panel, 7' 2 1/2" x 8' 7" (220 x 262 cm), Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

Altarpiece of the Last Judgment, c. 1445–48, oil on panel, open: 7 x 18' (2.1 x 5.4 m), Musée de l'Hôtel Dieu, Beaune, France.

Portrait of a Lady, c. 1460, oil on panel, 13 3/8 x 10 1/16" (34 x 25.5 cm), Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., USA.

Hugo van der Goes:

Portinari Altarpiece, c. 1475–76, oil on panel, center panel: 8 x 10' (2.4 x 3 m), lateral panels: 8 x 5' (2.4 x 1.5 m), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

Adoration of the Shepherds, c. 1480, oil on panel, 3' 2 1/4" x 8' (99 x 240 cm), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.

Further Reading:

Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in its Historical Context*.

James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*.

Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400–1500*.

Questions to Consider:

1. The artwork on altarpieces was usually commissioned. In what ways would this possibly affect an artist's work?
2. Despite a painting's size, it can have minute detail. Name a small detail in one of the works discussed in this lecture that you noticed that added significantly to the painting's subject.

Lecture Sixteen

Piero della Francesca in Arezzo

Scope: In this lecture, we will study a single artist, Piero della Francesca. Looking at three of his paintings, we will continue in the same vein as previous lectures by exploring his artistic renditions of sacred subjects, his use of symbolism, and his handling of specific Renaissance techniques. We will take a closer look at the rigorously designed paintings for which Piero is famous and discuss some of the artistic influences apparent in his works.

Outline

- I. Unlike most of the Italian artists we have studied so far, Piero della Francesca (1420–1492) was not from Florence or Siena or any other major Tuscan center of art, nor did he spend much time in them. He was born and died in the village of Borgo San Sepolcro, belonging to the Papal States. He spent his career painting in small cities, such as Urbino and Arezzo. His fame did not spread much beyond those places until the 20th century, when a perceived quality of geometric abstraction in his figure compositions attracted the attention of modernist painters and critics.
 - A. Our example shows Piero's *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1450). This was painted for a church in San Sepolcro as the center panel of a triptych, although the wings are by another artist. It was sold to a private collector in London in 1859 and was acquired by London's National Gallery in 1861, a remarkably early time for a museum to have shown interest in Piero's art.
 - B. The composition has an arched top that includes extensive landscape and figures. If we follow the arched top, inscribing an imaginary circle below, it includes the head and shoulders of St. John the Baptist and Christ.
 - C. The painting is divided vertically by the figure of Christ and divided horizontally in many other places with geometrical clarity.
 - D. Compare the figures to *Baptism of the Neophytes* in Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel; the nude figures are surely the inspiration for Piero's figures.
- II. Arezzo is a provincial town about 40 miles from Florence, which would seldom be visited by modern tourists were it not for the important fresco cycle that Piero painted, the *Legend of the True Cross*. This was painted in the chancel of the church of San Francesco.
 - A. Piero would have seen the same subject painted in the same location in the Florentine church of Santa Croce. That fresco cycle of the 1380s

was especially appropriate, because the church was dedicated to the Holy Cross. These pre-Renaissance paintings would have offered a model for the individual subjects from the legend but not for Piero's unique style.

- B. The complex *Legend of the True Cross* is a medieval narrative that can be read in the *Golden Legend*, an essential source for the lives of the saints. Compiled by a Dominican friar (later archbishop) in Genoa named Jacobus de Voragine around 1260, it is also the principal source for the story of the True Cross.
- C. The decoration of the chancel in San Francesco was begun by another artist who died after completion of the vault, which gave Piero the opportunity to paint the main scenes. Despite severe water damage, the cycle remains a pilgrimage goal for lovers of Renaissance art.
- D. We will look at three views of the walls of the chancel so that the layout can be visualized. The largest frescoes are on the lateral walls, three on each, and there are two smaller scenes on each side of the tall Gothic window at the end of the chancel.
 - 1. The right wall contains the *Death of Adam* at the top, the *Story of Solomon and Sheba* in the middle, and the *Battle of Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge* on the bottom. This last scene is preceded by the *Dream of Constantine*, painted on the window wall abutting the battle scene.
 - 2. The left wall comprises the *Battle of Heraclius and Chosroes*, out of sequence at the bottom, and the *Discovery and Verification of the True Cross* in the middle, preceded by a scene on the window wall showing a Jew named Judas compelled to reveal where the cross was buried; this is next to the scene of *Discovery*. The *Emperor Heraclius Returns the Cross to Jerusalem* is seen at the top.
 - 3. The window wall represents the *Burial of the Wood* at the upper right, and the *Dream of Constantine* on the bottom right; the *Jew Removed from the Well* is on the top left, and the *Annunciation* is on the bottom left.
- E. On the right wall, we will look closer at the *Death of Adam*.
 - 1. On the right side, Adam sits on the ground and Eve supports him, while his descendants contemplate his imminent death. Note the classical nude man leaning on his staff.
 - 2. On the left side is a severely damaged scene in which Adam has died. His son, Seth, has obtained a shoot from the tree of knowledge of good and evil brought from Eden, and he plants it in Adam's mouth. In the background, an enormous tree has grown from that shoot. This is an alternative account, because the *Golden Legend* says that Seth planted it "over Adam's grave, where it grew to be a great tree and was still standing in Solomon's time."

- F. Our next scene shows the Queen of Sheba and Solomon. Solomon had cut down the great tree, mentioned above, to use for building his temple, but because the beam fashioned from it was too large, he used it for a bridge. When the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she stopped at the bridge, and having the gift of prophecy, she knew that it would one day become the cross on which the Savior would hang. Hearing her prophecy, Solomon believed that the beam would lead to the destruction of the kingdom of the Jews, so he had it buried deep in the Earth.
 - 1. The painting is clearly divided into two sides. On the left is the Queen of Sheba and her entourage; the queen is pictured kneeling to adore the wood. Note the strong foreshortening of the white horse. On the right, the queen is meeting with Solomon in a subdivided interior.
 - 2. Compare this scene to Giotto's *Marriage of the Virgin*. Piero probably had seen this work, and consciously or otherwise, it figures in his composition. Note the division into exterior and interior, the severe figure style, and the clearly conceived cells of space. However, Piero brings a more mathematical and rigorous system to his space using an interior cube and, for his figures, stylizes the noble volumes of Giotto.
- G. *Dream of Constantine* depicts the story of the emperor's vision on the eve of battle against Maxentius. In his vision, Constantine saw the sign of the cross blazing in the sky, and an angel announced, "In this sign thou shalt conquer." He was unsure of the meaning until Christ appeared to him, telling him to have a battle standard made with the sign of the cross. Constantine triumphed in the historic battle at the Milvian Bridge near Rome, which led to his conversion to Christianity.
 - 1. Note the volume of the tent where Constantine sleeps. The scene is illuminated by a magical light, an angel carrying the sign of the cross that has been badly damaged. The light plays an important role in Constantine's vision.
 - 2. After this dream, Constantine sends his mother, Helena (St. Helen), to the Holy Land to find the True Cross.
- H. *Discovery and Verification of the True Cross* is a two-part scene that is placed directly opposite the painting of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon.
 - 1. The two scenes are against a common background and are reminiscent of Masaccio's *Tribute Money*, with its architectural perspective on the right and an atmospheric perspective in the deep space of the landscape on the left.
 - 2. Three crosses have been excavated, but the True Cross is found only during a funeral procession. The three crosses are held in turn

over a dead man's body, which is restored to life with the True Cross.

3. Note the powerful geometry of the architecture in the painting, which had no parallel yet in Renaissance Italy.

- I. The next image shows the *Annunciation*, which doesn't seem to have any place in the cycle. For that reason, it is sometimes called the *Annunciation to St. Helen*, telling her where the cross can be found. It follows the standard iconography of the Annunciation to Mary, except that the dove of the Holy Spirit is nowhere to be seen. The dove may have been painted in *fresco secco* and, thus, may have flaked off. The two stories may have been intentionally merged.

III. We can consider another masterpiece of Piero's career, the *Resurrection* (c. late 1450s, Town Hall, Borgo San Sepolcro).

- A. This painting shows the tomb, a Classical sepulcher, behind the front of the pictorial space. The guards surround it, most of them asleep, although one appears to be waking.
- B. The painting is organized geometrically, with Christ's head at the top of a pyramid shape. The torso of Christ is Classical (archaic manner), and his left leg is raised in motion. There is another division down the middle and across the center, with the lines crossing precisely at the navel of Christ.
- C. Winter and spring are both pictured in the landscape, which is symbolic of the Resurrection.
- D. Piero treats the subject objectively, letting it stand on its own.
- E. The Italian word *terribilit *, which means "awesomeness," is often applied to Michelangelo's figures, particularly in the Sistine Chapel, but it is also applicable to Piero's *Resurrection*.
- F. The painting was made for the building in which it remains, the town hall of Borgo San Sepolcro, the name meaning town of the Holy Sepulcher.

Works Discussed:

Piero della Francesca:

Baptism of Christ, c. 1450, tempera on panel, 66 x 46" (167 x 116 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Legend of the True Cross and details: *Death of Adam*, *Story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, *Dream of Constantine*, *Discovery and Verification of the True Cross*, *Annunciation*, c. 1455, fresco, Church of S. Francesco, Arezzo, Italy.

Resurrection, late 1450s, fresco, 7' 6" x 6' 6 1/2" (228.6 x 198.3 cm), Pinacoteca Comunale, San Sepolcro, Italy.

Further Reading:

Ronald Lightbown, *Piero Della Francesca*.

Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca: The Frescoes of San Francesco in Arezzo*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does geometry contribute to Piero della Francesca's paintings?
2. How does scene placement in a work like the *Legend of the True Cross* affect the overall significance or success of the art?

Lecture Seventeen

Sandro Botticelli

Scope: The well-known artist Botticelli is the subject of this lecture. We will delve into many of Botticelli's works to develop an understanding of his artistic range. We will also consider the historical times in which he lived and focus on a few events that may have influenced his painting. During our discussion, we will explore the span of Botticelli's paintings, from the sensual rendition of *Mars and Venus* to religious subjects, such as the tragic *Lamentation*. In addition, we will identify the unique characteristics that set Botticelli's paintings apart.

Outline

- I. In the late 19th century, no name in 15th-century Renaissance painting was held in higher regard than that of Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510).
 - A. He had a reputation as one of the greatest masters of the single line, or pure linearity, and his elegant, attenuated figures, and his admirers were considered persons of high taste.
 - B. Yet his reputation in his lifetime was tied to the turbulent political and religious events of the day, the fortunes of his Medici patrons, and his own changeable temperament. Botticelli fell from favor in the early 20th century, only to regain it as the range of intellectual and emotional expression in his art was better understood.
 - C. It is this stylistic variety and the political upheaval of the last quarter of the 15th century that we will discuss in this lecture.
- II. Our first image shows Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* (c. 1475–1478), which has also been dated in the 1480s. This is just one example of the dating problems with Botticelli. This painting was probably a decoration for a bed, bench, or chest to celebrate a wedding.
 - A. The painting shows a sensually clothed Venus regarding her lover, the naked god of war Mars. Baby satyrs have taken over his helmet and lance, clearly a phallic symbol, and one blows a conch shell in his ear, but nothing wakes him from his deep sleep after lovemaking. Venus remains alert and in command. The pronounced sensuality of this painting often surprises the viewer who associates Botticelli with Madonnas.
 - B. Venus's legs are wrapped in curving drapery, while those of Mars are angular. Botticelli uses line to create a plastic or three-dimensional quality.
 - C. It has often been suggested that the mythological lovers should be associated with the famous platonic romance between Giuliano de'

Medici and Simonetta Vespucci, given that *vespe* means "wasps," and some can be seen near Mars.

- III. Two of Botticelli's most famous paintings were commissioned by the same secondary branch of the Medici family for a villa near Florence.
 - A. The first of these is the *Primavera* ("Spring") (c. 1477–1478).
 1. This 10-foot-wide painting is symmetrical but with a suggestion of movement from the right toward the left. The figures are in an orange grove with a carpet of flowers. The central figure looking at us is *not* Spring but Venus, a Madonna-like figure who presides over the gathering in this grove dedicated to Love. Cupid is pictured above her.
 2. To the left of Venus are the Three Graces, thought to be her daughters and representing culture in Renaissance thought. At the far left is the god Mercury, the symbol of reason, who seems to be brushing away tiny clouds with his wand, in this sense, unclouding the mind.
 3. The beautiful and tantalizing figures at the right are the North Wind Zephyr blowing in and seizing the nymph Chloris. She is saved from his attack by the Classical trick described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—changing her nature. Chloris metamorphoses into Flora, goddess of Spring. The flowers on Flora's gown are actually on top of one of Chloris's right-hand fingers.
 4. The Humanist scholars in the Medici circle could have found multiple meanings in this scene to stimulate their conversation and thinking. One reason for the commission and invention of this painting may have been a wedding, like the one that probably inspired *Mars and Venus*.
 - B. In 1481–1482, Botticelli worked in Rome on the Sistine Chapel fresco decorations, but otherwise, he remained in Florence, where he had a large workshop.
 - C. Our next image shows the second painting commissioned for the Medici villa in Florence, *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1482). This is a Classical image of the birth of Venus, who was born from the sea and carried on a shell, by the wind, to shore.
 1. Venus, accompanied by rose petals, is moved toward the shore by the wind and water. She is taken in by the allegorical figure of Land, who clothes her.
 2. Botticelli had to visualize and invent this depiction because this subject had never before been painted. He looked to other subjects for his compositional model, a *Baptism of Christ* like one by Giotto.

IV. *The Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1478/1482) is our next image.

- A. The nativity architecture is a stable with a wooden roof in a Classical architectural ruin. There are triangles in the roof, representing the Trinity, and crosses can be seen inside the triangles. The new order of Christianity is symbolized by the stable, set within the old pagan order, which will crumble.
 - B. Note the extraordinary range of colors in this painting.
 - C. Although this work is undated, we can date it by the poses of the magi and the horses. These details suggest that Botticelli had seen Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* in Florence about 1482.
- V. Botticelli's *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1488–1490) was originally in the Church of San Marco in Florence. This painting depicts the coronation of the Virgin in the sky—Christ crowning his mother in heaven.
- A. Four saints are pictured: John the Evangelist, Augustine, Ambrose, and Eligius. (Remember the Lorenzo Monaco altarpiece with the same subject.)
 - B. The composition is divided into two tiers that show the subtlety with which the artist connects the standing saints with the heavenly level, where Christ and the Virgin are surrounded by angels.
 - C. This design became one of Raphael's favorite compositions, possibly with an eye to Botticelli's example. This painting is a splendid prototype for this design and an inspiration for other artists, including Titian, who used this type of composition.
 - D. The angels anticipate those in one of Botticelli's last paintings.
- VI. Our next image is the *Calumny of Apelles* (c. 1490s). *Calumny* refers to a painting by Apelles that no longer exists but was described by an ancient writer. As he had with *The Birth of Venus*, Botticelli based this painting on a written description of a lost work of antiquity. Leon Battista Alberti may have provided the impetus for this painting, because he advised artists to paint subjects that were described by ancient writers.
- A. In the center of the painting, an innocent man is dragged before an unjust judge, Midas. We recognize Midas because he has the ears of an ass that were the punishment for one of his previous sins. Midas's advisors are whispering untruths into his ears.
 - B. Hatred, in black with a torch, leads the trio of women who represent Calumny, Deceit, and Fraud. They drag the victim by his hair. At the left, Penitence is shown as an old woman in black, and Truth, literally the naked truth, proclaims the man's innocence.
 - C. Of the many fictive sculptures in the niches, the one directly above the innocent man resembles Donatello's *St. George*, a defender of the weak.
- D. This work was not a commission, and it seems doubtful that Botticelli painted it only to follow Alberti's advice.
 - 1. The work may be political. The passion that emanates from the painting may be attributed to the controversy over the Dominican preacher Savonarola, whose denunciation of contemporary morals and the ruling Medici split Florentine opinion.
 - 2. Botticelli was sufficiently moved by Savonarola's new morality that he threw some of his own paintings of nude figures onto the infamous bonfires of the vanities that Savonarola incited.
 - 3. Depending on its date, the painting could be an early defense of the monk whom many hated, or it could be a memorial of Savonarola's excommunication in 1497 and brutal public execution in 1498.
- VII. Another work, the *Mystic Nativity* (c. 1500), is a beautiful but strange painting. We see a ring of dancing angels in the sky, above a row of men embracing angels in the foreground. The Madonna is depicted adoring the Christ Child, while St. Joseph cowers in the nativity shed, and a fissure in the Earth reveals demons.
- A. The inscription on a band across the top of the picture is full of references to the Book of Revelation and refers equally to French invasions of Italy and to the trial and execution of Savonarola.
 - B. This is a profoundly personal painting, done toward the end of Botticelli's career.
- VIII. After 1500, Botticelli painted very little, but his tragic *Lamentation* (c. 1495–1500) may be one of his last major efforts.
- A. The composition contains curves and angles, parallelisms of figures, strong symmetry, and shallow space.
 - B. The painting shows Christ supported by St. John and another holy woman, with St. Mary Magdalene at his feet and another woman supporting his head. These figures are brilliantly lit against the darkness. St. Peter is at the right holding his attribute of keys. St. Jerome, with stone, and St. Paul, with his sword, are on the left.
 - C. *Pathos* is the quality in something experienced or observed that arouses feelings of pity, sorrow, sympathy, or compassion. The *Lamentation* has this quality magnified, and from it, we learn how to feel more intensely and cope with our own losses. It is a towering expression of both universal and particular grief.
 - D. These works give some idea of the range of Botticelli's art, which is much more than sweet paintings of Madonnas.

Works Discussed:

Sandro Botticelli:

Mars and Venus, c. 1475–78, tempera and oil on panel, 27 ¼ x 68 ¼" (69.2 x 173.4 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Primavera, c. 1477–78, tempera on panel, 6' 8" x 10' 4" (2 x 3.14 m), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

The Birth of Venus, c. 1482, tempera on canvas, 5' 9" x 9' 2" (1.75 x 2.79 m), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

The Adoration of the Magi, c. 1478/1482, tempera and oil on panel, 26 ¾ x 40 3/16" (68 x 102 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., USA.

Coronation of the Virgin, c. 1488–90, tempera on panel, 12' 5" x 8' 6" (3.78 x 2.59 m), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

Calumny of Apelles, 1490s, tempera on panel, 24 ½ x 36" (60.96 x 91.4 cm), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

Mystic Nativity, 1500, tempera on canvas, 42 ¼ x 29 ½" (108.6 x 74.9 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Lamentation, c. 1495–1500, tempera on panel, 54 ½ x 82" (137.16 x 208 cm), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

Further Reading:

Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*.

Barbara Deimling, *Sandro Botticelli, 1444/45–1510*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Botticelli's work contrast with the earlier painting of Masaccio? How has your impression of Botticelli's work changed since listening to this lecture?
2. Consider Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and *Calumny of Apelles*, which had never before been painted. What might be the advantages of painting a subject never before depicted? What might be the disadvantages?

Lecture Eighteen

Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini

Scope: In this lecture, we focus on two artists in northern Italy, Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini. We will look at several of Mantegna's works, including both sacred and secular subjects. Looking at his famous frescoes in the Ducal Palace in Mantua, we can appreciate the illusionism, in his paintings of the Gonzaga family, that influenced artists for centuries to come. Mantegna also influenced Bellini, the other subject of this lecture. We will explore two of Bellini's early works, *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, and contrast them with those of Mantegna.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, we move from Tuscany to the Veneto in northern Italy, near the Adriatic Sea, to study Andrea Mantegna (1430/31–1506). Mantegna was born near Padua, close to the Venetian Lagoon and about 20 miles from Venice. Although Padua fell under Venetian control in 1405, it remained an important artistic center throughout the 15th century. As a Paduan artist, Mantegna worked in a city steeped in learning and supportive of the new Humanism of the 15th century.
- II. Many minor artists stand apart from the major styles of their time because they do not grasp the importance of the developments that are taking place. But there are also great artists who understand what is important in their time, appreciate it, participate in its development, and still stand somewhat apart from it. Andrea Mantegna is one of those unusual artists.
 - A. Mantegna is a Renaissance artist. He shared that period's intellectual and Humanistic ideals, used the linear perspective system with precision, tapped the Greco-Roman sources of style, and balanced the secular aspect of Humanism with the established Christian culture. He is distinguished by his exaggerated approach to some of these ideas.
 - B. Mantegna's foreshortening and perspective are rigorous and accentuated, and his picture structure is mathematically analytical. His figures often look like painted statues. His love of Roman architectural and sculptural remains was almost obsessive. He incorporated his archeological "finds" into his painting. His figures can seem detached, even unemotional (like those of Piero della Francesca), while at other times, they are anguished in their emotional fervor.
 - C. Mantegna painted altarpieces and narrative frescoes for churches and chapels, and he was one of the most innovative decorators of palace interiors, developing both perspective and other illusionistic devices. His influence in this area continued for centuries.

III. Our first example shows Mantegna's *St. Sebastian* (c. 1460).

- A. St. Sebastian almost appears carved rather than modeled, showing a comprehension of anatomy that seems learned from ancient sculpture rather than the living body.
- B. Note the complex architectural ruin. Given that St. Sebastian was a Roman soldier, the Roman architecture is historically appropriate. Mantegna immersed himself in the study of antiquity, and he took this opportunity to show fragments of Roman architecture.
- C. The saint is bound to a Corinthian column attached to a square pier from which an arch rises until it is cut off by the frame. A marble terrace is behind him, and fragments of sculpture are scattered about.
- D. A mountain landscape at left leads the eye to a blue sky with brilliant white clouds that look three-dimensional and tangible.
- E. St. Sebastian was a popular subject in Renaissance times because painting him gave the artist an opportunity to study and reproduce the nude figure. The saint, a Roman soldier, had converted to Christianity and sought to convert others. He was arrested and sentenced to death. In the countless paintings and sculptures of St. Sebastian's intended execution by an archery squad, artists treated the subject in many ways, and the number of arrows in his body varies from one to a quiver-full.
- F. Mantegna multiplies the arrows so that contemplation of the saint is painful, especially the arrow piercing his skull from the neck through his head. In this overemphasis on physical torment and in placing the tortured body at the front of the picture, Mantegna commands our attention and empathy.
- G. St. Sebastian survived the archery squad, was nursed back to health by St. Irene, and returned to preaching Christianity. He was later beaten to death with clubs, and his body was thrown into a Roman sewer.

IV. In 1460, Mantegna was invited by Ludovico Gonzaga, ruler of Mantua, to move to that city, not far from Padua. Inland and south of Verona, Mantua was situated in a swampy, unappealing locale.

- A. It was also the capital of the Gonzaga family, a rich and powerful dynasty whose taste for culture was highly developed and who invited artists, writers, and musicians from other areas to visit or settle at their court. Mantegna arrived when he was about 30 and remained for the rest of his life. His principal legacy is there, a famous frescoed room in the Ducal Palace.
- B. Our image shows the frescoed room, the Camera degli Sposi (Ducal Palace, Mantua), which was completed in 1474. The completion of this epochal decoration coincided with the start of construction of the Church of Sant'Andrea, designed by Leon Battista Alberti, also

commissioned by Ludovico. Two such concurrent commissioned projects indicate the scope of the Gonzaga family's cultural ambition.

- C. The image shows a corner view of the room with a chimney piece at right.
 - 1. Located in one of the towers of the palace, this room's name, which translates roughly as the "chamber of the married couple," or "of the bride and groom," was assigned later, based on the inscription painted on the illusionistic plaque over the door. The inscription commemorates the married life of the Marchese and Marchesa Gonzaga rather than their wedding.
 - 2. The room was used as a banquet and entertainment hall and a place where precious artworks were displayed. It was known to contemporaries simply as the *camera picta*, the "painted room."
- D. It is the astonishing illusionism of Mantegna's frescoes that, together with their beautiful design and color, constitutes their significance in art history. This is the first known instance of a painted decoration that was conceived as a continuous composition over the walls *and* the ceiling of a room and was designed to give the illusion that the painted space on the walls and ceiling was a continuation of the real space of the room.
- E. In the picture, it appears that we stand not in a completely enclosed space but in a loggia open to other spaces in the palace. The plaque over the door appears to be bronze or gilded metal with an engraved inscription. The plaque is supported by standing and flying *putti*, winged children, not angels, with a blue sky beyond them as though we are looking beyond this imaginary loggia.
- F. On this same wall, to the right of the door, is a fresco that depicts the *Arrival of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga*; he is returning to Mantua from Rome. This section of the wall is meant to be read as continuing the landscape glimpsed behind the plaque-carrying *putti*.
 - 1. The cardinal is greeted by his father, the marchese. The other figures include a trio of Gonzaga children; the eldest of them is the cardinal's younger brother, Ludovico. The cardinal holds Ludovico's right hand while the youngest child, Sigismondo, grasps Ludovico's left hand. This is a moment of family intimacy uncommon in Renaissance painting.
 - 2. Behind the figures is a hilly landscape unlike marshy Mantua; it is dotted with buildings that evoke Rome, from which the cardinal has come.
- G. The windows of this square room illuminate only two walls, leaving the other two in shadow. Mantegna painted the two lighted walls, those with doors, and the rib-vaulted ceiling. By making them appear open to the sky, he created the illusion of more light entering the room.

H. The wall to the right of this scene contains one of the most well-known Renaissance frescoes, *The Gonzaga Family*, which depicts Marchese Ludovico Gonzaga and his family and court. No such painting of an aristocratic family group in a domestic architectural setting had ever been seen in Italy.

1. Mantegna turned the mantelpiece of the huge fireplace into a stage on which he presented the Gonzaga family and their court. Leading up to that stage, he painted a staircase at the right with courtiers arriving to greet the Gonzaga family. As the small procession reaches the “stage” level, Mantegna introduces a dramatic pause with the elegant young man standing in front of the decorated pilaster.

2. The architecture visible at the top of this image, the triangular area terminating in or supported by an urn-shaped bracket, is real architecture, part of the structure of the room. The flat pilaster is as unreal as the young man who stands in front of it on the “real” mantelpiece. Both are painted illusions.

3. The group framed by illusionistic pilasters includes the marchese at the left, the marchesa, and numerous family members and retainers. Among the retainers is an older female dwarf. Renaissance and Baroque courts in Europe frequently retained dwarves, in part because of their strangeness. Mantegna has painted this small woman naturalistically, which is part of the Humanism, as well as the humanity, of the artist.

I. The oculus is a vaulted room, which is largely covered with smaller figures painted in monochrome, as if they were small sculptures. The center features an illusion of an open *oculus*, a circular opening to the cloud-filled blue sky above. It is surrounded by female heads looking down at us and by small *putti* standing on the cornice of the fictive balustrade around the opening. This began a tradition of illusionistic ceiling painting that continued for centuries. Many later artists who painted splendid illusionistic decorations visited Mantua to see this initiator and paradigm of the type; Correggio, Veronese, Titian, Rubens, and Tiepolo all found their model here.

V. Around 1460, Mantegna painted *Christ on the Mount of Olives (Agony in the Garden)* (c. 1460). This event follows the Last Supper, when Jesus, Peter, James, and John go to Gethsemane (the Mount of Olives). Jesus then asks the three apostles to watch and wait, but they fall asleep while he prays for the “cup” of approaching death to be taken from him.

- A. The landscape is rocky and expressive. A city meant to be Jerusalem can be seen in the distance. A group of soldiers led by Judas makes its way up the path to capture Christ.

- B. In the upper left-hand corner is a group of five angels who bear the instruments of Christ’s Passion.

- C. Compare this rendition to Giovanni Bellini’s *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (c. 1465–1470), which was painted a few years later.

1. Bellini, a Venetian artist, shows the same scene taking place at dawn. His painting features a sloping landscape like that of Italy. Judas is again seen with a group of soldiers in the background.
2. Although there is an extraordinary stylistic contrast, the scenes are similar in appearance. This similarity can be explained by the fact that Mantegna married Bellini’s sister. The two artists were in direct contact, and here Mantegna inspired Bellini.

VI. Our next painting is useful to mark the transfer of the center of artistic activity in northern Italy from Padua to Venice. Venice developed into one of the most vital cities for the production of Renaissance art in the 16th century.

- A. Our example shows an oil painting by Giovanni Bellini (1430–1516), *St. Francis in Ecstasy* (c. 1480–1485).

- B. Few paintings of the Renaissance period convey as powerful a sensation of a landscape flooded with light as this one. Light penetrates the crevices of rocks and reveals wildflowers and small animals, which St. Francis greets with his arms spread in adoration of God’s nature. It is dawn, as in *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. Light is life; the Earth is awakening.

- C. St. Francis of Assisi is not presented here in the usual way, as the praying saint receiving the stigmata; in this painting, he already has the wounds of Christ’s crucifixion. Bellini represents the St. Francis whose religious Humanism transformed the Church in the 13th century. His fervent love of nature was his most beloved characteristic, and his humility and simple life were admired.

- D. Contrast Mantegna’s *St. Sebastian* and Bellini’s *St. Francis*, and the contribution of Bellini’s innovations to subsequent Venetian art is clear.

Works Discussed:

Andrea Mantegna:

St. Sebastian, c. 1460, tempera on panel, 26 ¾ x 11 ¾" (68 x 30 cm), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Arrival of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, The Gonzaga Family, and ceiling oculus, 1474, fresco, Camera degli Sposi, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy.

Christ on the Mount of Olives (Agony in the Garden), c. 1460, tempera on panel, 24 ¾ x 31 ½" (62.9 x 80 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Giovanni Bellini:

Christ on the Mount of Olives, c. 1465–70, tempera on panel, 32 x 50" (81.3 x 127 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

St. Francis in Ecstasy, c. 1480–1485, tempera and oil on panel, 49 x 55 ¾" (124.4 x 141.9 cm), The Frick Collection, New York City, New York, USA.

Further Reading:

Nike Batzner, *Mantegna (Masters of Italian Art Series)*.

Keith Christiansen, *Andrea Mantegna: Padua and Mantua (The Great Frescoes of the Renaissance Series)*.

Peter Humfrey, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Giovanni Bellini*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Mantegna use illusionism to extend the space in the Camera degli Sposi in the Ducal Palace?
2. How does Bellini introduce light into a painting? Is this unique or similar to other artists' portrayal of light?

Lecture Nineteen

High Renaissance Painting in Venice

Scope: In this lecture, we continue to explore Venetian painting with Giovanni Bellini, then proceed to his great pupils, Giorgione and Titian. First, we will look at a portrait by Bellini and one of his great altarpieces in the Church of San Zaccaria. Next, we will study only one of Giorgione's works, which has been in the Louvre for centuries. Finally, we will look at Titian in greater detail, including two altarpieces and a sensual portrayal of an ancient myth, *Bacchus and Ariadne*.

Outline

- I. When the oil medium was introduced into Venetian art, it was magnified by Venetian painters, enabling it to reach the highest level of brilliance and saturation of color. Steeped in the reflected gleam of countless Byzantine mosaics, Venetian artists quickly understood the expressive potential of oil painting, and from the late 16th century through the mid-18th century, they explored and refined the range of color and its decorative and expressive possibilities.
- II. Our first example shows Bellini's painting *Doge Leonardo Loredan* (c. 1501). The painting is signed in Latin on the *cartello*, the small piece of paper illusionistically depicted on the parapet. The *doge* ("duke") was head of the Venetian state, elected for life from the aristocracy by his peers, although his powers were severely restricted by the Council of Ten and a constitutional charter.
 - A. This portrait was probably painted upon the accession of Loredan as doge. He served for 20 years during one of the most dangerous periods for the survival of the Venetian Republic. The Papal States, the Holy Roman Empire, the French, and other powerful enemies were arrayed against Venice, but the republic closed ranks around Doge Loredan and held off the combined enemies, partly through luck and partly through courageous action. The republic survived with most of its territories intact and unharmed, although its financial situation was weakened.
 - B. This is one of the most hypnotic portraits in Italian art. The purity of line and shape translates into character, while the clarity of light and form translates into intellect.
 - C. Loredan seems to look toward the late afternoon sun, which reflects light in his pupils. The contrast of the lit and shadowed sides of his face is typical in portraiture. The dark side is usually the left side and represents vulnerability. Here, the duke's face is mostly in the light. Loredan makes no gesture or counter-movement, which translates into dignity and moral superiority.

- D. There is a vivid but restricted palette and a strong pattern in the fabric, constituted of damask woven with golden thread. This painting owes much to Netherlandish painting, including the effects from the oil medium, aspects of the character, and the presentation of a figure.
- III. Bellini's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints (San Zaccaria Altarpiece)* (c. 1505) is in a prestigious church dedicated to the father of St. John the Baptist. The church was founded by a doge and the eastern emperor in the 9th century and was always closely associated with the doges.
- The painting shows a gathering of saints called a *sacred conversation*. From the left is St. Peter and behind him is St. Catherine of Alexandria. Near the Madonna is St. Lucy with an oil lamp and St. Jerome in the red cardinal vestments.
 - The architectural frame is integral to the altarpiece, with the painting slightly behind it. The Madonna and Child are on the throne with a half dome decorated in mosaics above them.
 - The figures are arranged in a pyramidal shape, with the two male saints forming the corners and the Madonna's head as the top.
 - Note the way the light falls across the figures from the left. St. Lucy is struck fully by the light, which is appropriate given that light equates with purity.
 - The male saints are painted from a frontal view, whereas the female saints are painted in profile turned toward the Madonna.
 - This painting was the masterpiece of Bellini's old age.
- IV. As seen in *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, Bellini reveled in the landscape of the Venetian mainland territory, producing a vibrant record of nature in detail and in sweep. This love of landscape is a crucial feature of Venetian painting, and it was principally by Venetian painters that landscape art was introduced from northern Europe into Italy, where it increased in importance during the 16th and 17th centuries. This interest in landscape continues with the great pupils of Bellini, particularly Giorgione and Titian.
- V. Giorgione (1476/78–1510), born in Castelfranco, was a student of Bellini during the mid-1490s. We see his *Pastoral Concert* (in French, *Concert Champêtre*, or *Fête Champêtre*) (c. 1510–1511). In the past, this painting was sometimes attributed to Titian, but the attribution to Giorgione now is generally accepted. Giorgione developed his own style based on Bellini's example and was extremely influential on later artists.
- There are four principal figures in the foreground, two clothed males and two nude females, a puzzling arrangement.
 - Music forms part of the core of the painting. One man plays a lute, and one woman has a wind instrument. In the Renaissance, music was associated with passion.
- The other woman pours a crystal glass of water into a stone urn. This figure may represent the Classical ideal, while the seated woman may represent human passion.
 - The landscape is based on the Venetian mainland territory.
 - This painting often is associated with Arcadian Classical poetry, in particular the work of Virgil and Ovid, and may represent a golden age now past.
 - This painting, on display in the Louvre for 200 years, has been a great influence on countless painters, poets, and writers.
- VI. Titian (1488/90–1576) was born Tiziano Vecellio in the village of Pieve di Cadore, north of Venice in the foothills of the Dolomite mountains. As a boy, he may have been apprenticed to mosaicists in Venice, then to Gentile Bellini, followed by his brother, Giovanni. He was also a friend and colleague of Giorgione, who was about 10 years older. They developed their styles together but had different temperaments. Giorgione died young, leaving some unfinished paintings. Titian probably completed a number of those works while continuing to develop his own unique style over the course of a long career. He was probably not yet 30 when his early masterpiece was completed, for the high altar of the Basilica of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, commonly called the Frari, the venerable Franciscan church in Venice.
- In our example, we are looking through the nave and choir door into the apse. Titian's High Renaissance painting is in the major chapel (*cappella maggiore*). The *Assumption of the Virgin*—the altarpiece—is in perfect harmony with the Gothic architecture of the apse.
 - The 23-foot-tall *Assumption of the Virgin* was consecrated on May 19, 1518.
 - This work is a three-tier composition. From the bottom up, it depicts the apostles at the empty tomb of the Virgin, Mary being carried up to heaven, and Mary greeted by God at the top. The scenes are linked together by the apostles' hands reaching up and the light connecting Mary and God.
 - This is a perfect example of the High Renaissance style as developed in Florence and Rome, as we will see later in Raphael.
 - Another altarpiece, the *Madonna of the Pesaro Family* (c. 1519–1526), 16 feet tall, was commissioned for the left side of the nave.
 - The Madonna and Child are at the right; St. Peter is in the center; Jacopo Pesaro, who defeated the Moors in battle, is at the lower left. Behind Jacopo, an armored soldier holds a banner with the Borgia family coat of arms. Jacopo commanded papal forces in the victory, and the pope was a Borgia; this also explains the dominant position of St. Peter, who represents the Church. At the lower left are two Moorish captives.

2. At the lower right are male members of the Pesaro family. Above them, St. Francis and another Franciscan commend the family members to the Madonna.
3. On the cloud bank above, two cherubs hold a cross. This asymmetrical composition with an upward diagonal sweep was new and was very influential.

VII. Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (c. 1522) was painted for Alphonso d'Este, duke of Ferrara, for a room called the Alabaster Chamber in his palace. Giovanni Bellini had completed one of his last paintings for this room, and Titian executed the remaining three paintings.

- A. The subject is Bacchus discovering Ariadne. Ariadne has just been abandoned by Theseus, and Bacchus leaps from his chariot to rescue her.
- B. Note the energetic design of the space between Bacchus and Ariadne as well as the crown of Ariadne in the sky.
- C. Titian had access to the translations of ancient literary sources from the duke's library, from which he derived this scene.

VIII. Titian's *Rape of Europa* (c. 1562) was painted for Philip II of Spain, who was one of the greatest collectors of Titian's work. The subject is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when Jupiter adopted the appearance of a white bull and approached the daughter of the king of Tyre, whom he desired. The king's daughter, Europa, climbed aboard and was immediately taken out to sea and to Crete by the swimming bull-god.

- A. The eroticism is overt, yet the sublime palette and extemporizing brushwork of the aged Titian are the true protagonists.
- B. Venetian painting is famous for this kind of sensuality and splendid color.
- C. The composition is asymmetrical, with the bull carrying Europa about to leave the picture.

Works Discussed:

Giovanni Bellini:

Doge Leonardo Loredan, c. 1501, oil on panel, 24 1/4 x 17 3/4" (61.6 x 45.1 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

San Zaccaria Altarpiece, 1505, oil on panel, c. 16' 6" H (5 m H), Church of S. Zaccaria, Venice, Italy.

Giorgione:

Pastoral Concert (Concert Champêtre), c. 1510–11, oil on canvas, 43 1/4 x 54 1/4" (110 x 138 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

Titian:

Assumption of the Virgin, 1516–18, 23' H (7 m H), Church of Sta. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice, Italy.

Madonna of the Pesaro Family, 1519–26, oil on canvas, c. 16' H (4.8 m H), Church of Sta. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice, Italy.

Bacchus and Ariadne, c. 1522, oil on canvas, 5' 9 1/2" x 6' 3 1/4" (176.5 x 191 cm), National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Rape of Europa, 1562, oil on canvas, 5' 10" x 6' 8 3/4" (178 x 205 cm), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

Further Reading:

Bruce Cole, *Titian and Venetian Painting, 1450–1590*.

Peter Humphrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How is landscape exploited in the paintings of Venetian Renaissance artists?
2. Many Venetian artists painted both secular and sacred works. Did they approach these subjects in similar or different ways?

Lecture Twenty

The High Renaissance—Leonardo da Vinci

Scope: Although Leonardo da Vinci explored many subjects and techniques during his lifetime, we will consider only one drawing and three paintings. We will examine how Leonardo used various media in his art and discuss his influential innovations in the *Madonna of the Rocks*, the *Mona Lisa*, and *The Last Supper*.

Outline

- I. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) was not only a great painter, he was a genius whose mind ranged over every imaginable subject. His notebooks contain thousands of pages revealing his incessant curiosity.
- II. Our first example is a pen-and-ink landscape drawing dated August 5, 1473 (Uffizi). This depiction of the Arno River valley, drawn when Leonardo was 21 years old, is a vivid introduction to the artist's interests and abilities. We have seen the beginnings of Naturalistic painting of landscape motifs in northern European painting and its gradual introduction into Italian art, but Leonardo discovered the natural world for himself.
 - A. His drawing reveals a new and rare quality in the depiction of landscape. He conveys the sense of a landscape in process, with movement and growth, as well as an underlying geological structure.
 - B. Leonardo suggests the source of the living natural world with a line that vibrates or by applying rapidly drawn lines laid down side by side. His trees, drawn with parallel lines or with stacks of repeated arcs, are growing and moving in the wind. He understands and finds a linear equivalent for the movements of water.
 - C. His pen line is alive, and his command of space is convincing. This is a drawing that suggests both observation and rapidity of execution. He knew both this landscape and his medium completely.
- III. In 1481 or 1482, Leonardo left Florence for Milan. He worked there for nearly 20 years for the duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, as well as other patrons. Soon after his arrival in Milan, he received a commission—shared with two Milanese artists—for the altarpiece for a new chapel in the Church of San Francesco Grande. The commission came from the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, and Leonardo was to paint the center panel. This painting is the *Madonna of the Rocks* (begun in 1483).
 - A. The subject required was a Madonna and Child with angels, but Leonardo created something more ambitious and less comprehensible—a kneeling Madonna with the Christ Child, a single angel, and the child St. John the Baptist.
 1. The Madonna kneeling on the ground—a Madonna of humility—was not a new subject. Usually, the Madonna was shown adoring the Christ Child, but in this painting, she looks at John with downcast eyes and embraces him. John folds his hands in prayerful adoration of Jesus, who raises his hand in blessing toward John.
 2. St. John the Baptist was the prophet who proclaimed “there is the lamb of God” upon baptizing Jesus. A non-canonical author added the story that the Holy Family, on the return from Egypt, stayed with Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, and that her young child, John, recognized the divinity of the infant Jesus and adored him. This subject is not found in painting before Leonardo.
 - B. Jesus is “crowned” by two hands: Mary’s left hand at the top, extended in a gesture of benediction, and the angel’s hand, which points toward the infant John.
 - C. It seems as though John is the center of attention. The Madonna’s hand protects him, the angel focuses on him, and the Christ Child blesses him.
 - D. The greater mystery of the painting may be its landscape setting. The figures are in front of a dark grotto capped with sky above, which opens into the light in the distance, but the area between the foreground and the distance looks like an underground cavern.
 - E. The modeling of the figures is subtle, a spreading of light into dark so gradual that it seems as if a newly invented painting tool, finer than a brush, must have been used to control this smoky, gliding atmosphere. The effect is to slow down the tempo of our viewing.
 - F. The monumental figure group is stable and static, the landscape develops slowly, and the gradation of light is dreamlike but controlled. This is an original, yet ambiguous interpretation of the Madonna and Child.
 - G. This painting was still incomplete in 1506, though it was provisionally accepted by the confraternity, and there is some debate about its subsequent history. Leonardo had a restless imagination and often left works incomplete, and his experimental techniques sometimes caused his finished works to deteriorate rapidly.
 - H. The deepest darks in Leonardo’s paintings are profound. This led his followers and imitators to further exaggerate darkness and make the contrast between light and dark their aim rather than the gradation from light to dark.
- IV. The next example is Leonardo’s enigmatic portrait, the *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503–1506).
 - A. This painting represents a half-length portrait of a woman seated in an armchair in front of a parapet with a loggia behind. Her left arm rests on

a chair arm while her right hand rests on her left arm. She is well dressed, in a robe with a scarf draped over it and with a dark veil covering her hair. A close-up portrait of this size, with ample pictorial space to embrace the sculptural volume of the sitter, had not been seen before, and its influence was immediate.

- B. The painting has been cut down on the sides, but there is still a partial column on the parapet at the left and the base of another at the right.
- C. The landscape behind her shows a winding road and a bridge in the middle ground, but it changes from a real and inhabitable landscape as it stretches into the background, where it is dominated by water and rocks that recall those in the *Madonna of the Rocks*.
- D. The horizon is at the sitter's eye level, which brings us back to this famous face. It is famous for the modeling, which is the same subtle, smoky painting of flesh as in the *Madonna of the Rocks*, and for her enigmatic smile.
- E. It is believed that the sitter was a Florentine named Lisa Gherardina. *Mona* is the abbreviated version of *Ma Donna* ("My Lady"). Combined with her first name, we get *Mona Lisa*, the title universally used in the English-speaking world.
 - 1. Lisa was married to a silk merchant and local politician named Francesco del Giocondo. In Italy, the portrait is called *La Gioconda* (and, in France, *La Joconde*). *Giocondo* means "joyous" in Italian, and it has been suggested that Leonardo used her married name as an emblem, an idea that would be central to the portrait.
 - 2. It was not a new idea to identify a sitter by a punning reference to his or her name, but it was usually a plant or animal or object that provided the reference point. To use a facial expression was an original idea. The painting has become famous because of the character of the smile, not because of its connection to her name.
 - 3. The famous smile is hard to characterize, partly because of Leonardo's smoky modeling, which leaves the shadowy corners of her mouth ambiguous in expression.
 - 4. Renaissance ideals of decorum may also have influenced the smile. A 16th-century Italian writer suggested that a fashionable woman should smile "as if you were smiling secretly...not in an artificial manner, but as though unconsciously...and accompanied by...certain movements of the eyes."
- V. *The Last Supper* (c. 1495–1498, refectory) belongs to an earlier moment in Leonardo's career, shortly after he had begun work on the *Madonna of the Rocks*.
 - A. The story of the Last Supper, recounted in all the Gospels, was a celebration of the Jewish feast of Passover, which for Christians was accorded a new meaning. Mural paintings, usually frescoes, of the Last

Supper often were painted in the refectories (dining halls) of monasteries, where the monks would contemplate the Last Supper of the Lord, which was the prototype of the Mass, the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

- B. The painting spans the end wall of a long room, and it is designed so that the space in which Christ and his apostles have gathered looks like an extension of the architecture of the refectory itself. At the front of this painted space is the dinner table, its white tablecloth virtually identical with the wall surface.
- C. The recession of the side walls is measured by wall hangings. Although very dark today, they were representations of tapestries with an overall floral design. The right wall is illuminated; the left is in shadow. The ceiling of the room also contributes to the illusion of recession, because it is painted as if coffered and the coffers follow the rules of perspective.
- D. The rear wall of the mural is pierced by three windows with a view onto a distant landscape. The center window, behind Christ, has a semicircular pediment, suggestive of a halo.
- E. The figure of Christ, his outstretched arms touching the table, forms a triangle. The 12 apostles are divided, first, into two groups of six to each side and, second, into subgroups of three. Each subgroup is tightly knit compositionally. Scanning the row of heads, there is a wave-like arrangement, surging and ebbing, contained by the two apostles on either end who close the composition.
- F. The apostles are agitated, and this emotion sets this interpretation of the subject apart from previous works. Compare this to Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Last Supper* (c. 1480) in the refectory of the church of the Ognissanti in Florence.
 - 1. In Leonardo's painting, the apostles are responding to something that has been said—Christ's announcement that "one of you will betray me."
 - 2. Other depictions of the Last Supper may also show a response to that declaration, but it is inward, contemplative, or disbelieving. More frequently, the Last Supper is treated as a sacramental, not a dramatic, occasion because the ritual of the Mass is deemed more important than the human drama.
- G. Leonardo showed a range of response to this statement by painting each apostle with a character-revealing reaction—anger, astonishment, fear, gesture of devotion, or self-doubt.
 - 1. Only one of them makes no assertive response to the declaration—Judas, who has already accepted payment to betray Jesus. In previous representations of the Last Supper, Judas is placed alone on the near side of the table, so that the viewer has no doubt about

his identity. Instead, Leonardo includes him with the others. But Judas shrinks back, his right forearm on the table, the money bag grasped in his hand. No other apostle's arms—only hands—are on the table. Only Judas's face is in partial shadow, and his head is lower than any other. His body is smaller; he shrinks from the words that he alone, of all the apostles, knows to be true.

2. Judas's head is grouped with those of Peter and John. Christ's simple pose is complex in detail and meaning—he is silent, sad, and submissive. His right hand extends toward Judas, whose hand is near his. Christ's hand is palm down, accusing Judas, "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table." At the same time, Christ's right hand indicates the glass of wine, the symbol of his blood used in the Mass, while his left hand extends toward the bread, the symbol of his body.
- H. The triangular pose of Christ is a reference to the Trinity, an emblematic abstraction of his words, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."
- I. The hand with forefinger pointing straight upward to the right of Christ belongs to Thomas, whose probing finger verified the physical resurrection of Christ and, here, pointing to heaven, is a harbinger of the physical ascension.
- J. Leonardo's *The Last Supper* is a ruin. He was not a fresco painter, and he painted on this wall (an outside wall, with no room on the other side to prevent the incursion of water) with a mixture of oil paint and tempera. The paint did not adhere well to the wall and was decaying even during Leonardo's lifetime. In spite of this, other artists who saw the work or copies of it were influenced by it and tried to emulate Leonardo's genius.

Works Discussed:

Leonardo da Vinci:

Landscape, 1473, pen and ink drawing, 7 ¾ x 11 ¼" (19.6 x 28.7 cm), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

Madonna of the Rocks, begun 1483, oil on canvas, 6' 6 ¼" x 4' (199 x 122 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

Mona Lisa, 1503–06, oil on panel, 30 ¼ x 20 ¾" (77 x 53 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

The Last Supper, 1495–98, tempera and oil on plaster, 15 x 29' (4.6 x 8.8 m), Refectory, Church of Sta. Maria delle Grazie, Milan, Italy.

Domenico Ghirlandaio:

The Last Supper, 1480, fresco, Refectory, Church of the Ognissanti, Florence, Italy.

Further Reading:

Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci*.

Pietro C. Marani, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Leonardo's treatment of light and dark influence his painting? Is his technique appropriate for the subject(s) when used?
2. It has been said that the *Mona Lisa*'s smile is her identifying mark. What other personal identification marks or symbols have been used in paintings? Do you think this is, in fact, an identification mark or merely coincidental?

Lecture Twenty-One

The High Renaissance—Raphael

Scope: We again will study a single artist in this lecture—Raphael. Celebrating the variety of Raphael's work, we will look at examples of his frescoes and portraiture, and subjects ranging from the Madonna to Roman mythology. We also will look at the artist's compositional innovations of movement and stasis, and the expressive contours of his figures.

Outline

- I. Raphael (1483–1520) was born in Urbino, the son of a minor painter named Giovanni Sanzio. He was a youthful prodigy with a pleasing personality. He trained in fresco, oil, and tempera painting, and the science of perspective. His reputation, like Botticelli's, was virtually unassailable in the 19th century, when his work was considered the apogee of good taste in art. Although Raphael's reputation has had ups and downs, the variety of his achievement remains impressive.
- II. Our first example is the *Sistine Madonna* (c. 1513).
 - A. The *Sistine Madonna* was painted for the Church of S. Sixtus in Piacenza, which was supported by Pope Julius II. (The adjective "Sistine" derives from the name Sixtus.) St. Sixtus was an early Christian pope who was the patron saint of the Della Rovere family, and since Pope Julius II was a Della Rovere, in this painting, St. Sixtus has the features of Julius II.
 - B. Although Raphael is famous for his paintings of Madonnas, this example is unique. This Madonna and Child stand on clouds rather than appearing seated in a chair or kneeling in a landscape. She is flanked by St. Sixtus and St. Barbara and revealed by curtains that have been drawn back. The curtains are an illusion, but they are painted as if they were supported by a rod and drawn back to reveal a painting or a vision. The work is nearly 9 feet tall, singular in its monumentality among Raphael's images of the Madonna.
 - C. Raphael employed a triangular composition in illusionistic depth, creating a pyramidal shape that is characteristic of the High Renaissance.
 - D. St. Sixtus has a beard, for which there is an unusual explanation. During the war with France, Pope Julius II grew a beard and swore that he would not shave it off until the French were driven from Italy.
 - E. Though painted around 1513, the illusionism in this work offered inspiration to artists of the Baroque era. Raphael's greatness is attested

by the continuous borrowing from and reference to his works by artists of later centuries.

- F. The little angels depicted at the bottom are still irresistible despite commercial exploitation.

III. Our next example is *Galatea* (c. 1513–1514, Farnesina, Rome).

- A. Agostino Chigi, Sienese banker and treasurer to the pope, built a pleasure villa on the banks of the Tiber River and had it decorated with painted rooms. *Galatea* is a fresco in a room where the decoration remained incomplete. This work is an excellent example of movement balanced with stasis.
- B. The subject is taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; the nymph Galatea flees from Polyphemus, a one-eyed giant. She rides in her chariot, a giant cockleshell pulled by dolphins, accompanied by sea deities, including the intertwined pair at lower left. From above, three cupids aim their amorous arrows at Galatea. Note that Chigi built this villa for his mistress.
- C. During the High Renaissance (c. 1480–1520), artists favored the pyramid as a composition device. The greater development of volumetric solids in perspective space gave the appearance of a full-rounded pyramidal figure or group, as in our example.
- D. Galatea moves to the right in her chariot with her arms stretched to the right, while her legs and torso face the picture plane, and her head turns back to the left, watching Polyphemus. Her hair and the echoing drapery move toward the left.
- E. The tritons in the right middle ground also maintain the balance of opposing directions, one figure moving right, two moving left. The cupids in the sky form the corners of another triangle, effectively putting the capstone on the group below and canceling out the various directional cues.
- F. The compositional core remains Galatea, and the fresco's composition is generated by her S-shaped pose. She is one of Raphael's most inspired figures, and he repeated the design more than once.
- G. Polyphemus is, in fact, in another fresco by a different artist. Galatea looks across the corner of the room at him, thus including the actual space of the room in the drama, something that had a precedent in ancient painting.

IV. When Raphael painted *Galatea*, he had already completed some of the major monumental frescoes of the Renaissance in the papal apartments of the Vatican. Among these, the most famous is the *School of Athens* (c. 1510–1511) in the Stanza della Segnatura.

- A. The room that houses this painting takes its name, *Segnatura* ("signature"), from its later function as a chamber of the papal council

where the pope signed Church regulations. When decorated, it was Julius II's private library, which explains the subjects of its principal decorations, two frescoes devoted to theology and philosophy. The one representing philosophy is called the *School of Athens*, but the name was not associated with it until the 18th century.

- B. The wall of the painting is designed as a great semicircle. Raphael may have taken his cue from this sweeping curve to design within it an architectural space dominated by a great barrel vault. This barrel vault, together with the domed space perceived beyond it, is probably a reflection of St. Peter's Basilica, then under construction to replace the ancient Constantinian basilica. The new St. Peter's was a gigantic structure designed by Donato Bramante, who may have helped Raphael design the setting for this painting.
- C. The figures are numerous, and although some are "extras," others are intended as historic personages or portraits of living subjects or both.
 1. The group in the right foreground includes the ancient Greek mathematician Euclid bending over to demonstrate a geometric theorem. Raphael gives Euclid the features of Bramante.
 2. In the left foreground group, the half-kneeling, half-seated figure represents Pythagoras, putting down his proportional system. To the right of him, a figure props a book on his knee; this is the figure that Raphael reworked in the fresco of *Galatea*.
 3. The bearded man seated alone, leaning on a block of marble and writing down his ideas, is Michelangelo. His pose is loosely based on one of Michelangelo's figures on the Sistine ceiling, which was then being painted next door to the rooms being decorated by Raphael.
- D. There are more such portraits, but the center of the fresco is occupied by two powerfully conceived men who walk toward us, framed by the receding arches of the architecture. On the left is Plato, who is depicted with the features of Leonardo da Vinci. On the right is Plato's pupil Aristotle. Aristotle points to the Earth, the source of his rational observations, while Plato points to the heavens, the object of his metaphysical speculations. The receding lines of the architectural perspective grid cross in an X-shaped design that both unites and separates these two seminal philosophers. Perspective is wedded to meaning and significance by the artist.
- V. When Raphael had finished the Stanza della Segnatura, with the aid of many assistants, he moved on to the Room of Heliodorus (the Stanza d'Elidoro). Here he painted the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* (c. 1511–1512).
 - A. Pope Julius II is carried into the biblical scene on the left. The tale of Heliodorus, the treasurer of King Antiochus who was sent to appropriate the temple treasure, is related in the second book of Maccabees, an apocryphal book of the Old Testament.
 - B. Raphael had designed the structure of the *School of Athens* to epitomize rational control, an ordered composition centered on a pair of intellectual giants from the Classical world. The structure of the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* is an asymmetrical composition disrupted by a rush away from the center, a design that threatens reason and order.
 - C. An armed man on horseback appears, accompanied by two avenging figures with scourges, and they ride down Heliodorus and his soldiers as they try to leave with the temple treasure. The treasure has been spilled beside Heliodorus.
 - D. The cause of this miraculous salvation was the prayer of the high priest, who kneels at an altar in the center of the background. The center becomes a vacuum, while the violent assault at the right attracts the viewer's attention. This is not a modern observation; it was shared by Vasari, a 16th-century artist and biographer, writing soon after Raphael painted the fresco. Vasari focused on the group at the right, pointing out that only Heliodorus could see the heavenly visitation that attacked him.
 - E. Note the disruption of pictorial and emotional balance. Scholars once said that the period following Raphael's death witnessed the dissolution of Renaissance artistic style. Now, however, we recognize that this crumbling of the Renaissance pictorial order began with Raphael. The hallmarks of Renaissance painting were replaced with a style called *Mannerism*, which dominated the 16th century. The social order itself was crumbling—the Protestant Reformation had begun, and the French invasions of Italy would soon lead to the invasion of Emperor Charles V's mercenary armies and the Sack of Rome.
- VI. Our next example is *Baldassare Castiglione* (c. 1514–1515). This portrait portrays a valiant soldier who was also the author of *The Book of the Courtier* and a friend of Raphael.
 - A. This painting emulates the *Mona Lisa* in pose, but Raphael eliminated the details of the setting, including the chair, the loggia, and the background landscape. The figure is fuller than Leonardo's and has an air of self-confidence.
 - B. The palette is a balance of grays and blacks, of flesh tones and whites, against a luminous background of gray mingled with brown-beige tones.
 - C. The figure, with its superbly drawn contour, is one of the touchstones of great portraiture. Later, Rubens would copy it and Rembrandt would borrow from it.
 - D. Raphael recreated not just an appearance but a complete personality. Castiglione wrote *The Courtier*, a book that provided entry into a group

of the most cultured people in the Italy of Raphael's day, those who lived at or visited the court at Urbino, the small principality near the Adriatic.

1. During conversations, these intellectuals, presided over by the duchess of Urbino, considered both light and contentious topics, with each monologue preceded by "he smiled and said" or "she laughed and replied"—serious debates conducted in a civilized manner.
2. Such questions as whether one should serve or leave an evil master, or whether the most beautiful music is vocal or instrumental, or the advantages of speaking several languages, concerned these cultivated persons and the gentleman who still lives through the skill of Raphael's brush.

Works Discussed:

Raphael:

Sistine Madonna, 1513, oil on canvas, 8' 10" x 6' 7 1/4" (269.5 x 201 cm), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, Germany.

Galatea, 1513–14, fresco, 9' 10" x 7' 2 1/2" (300 x 220 cm), Villa Farnesina, Rome, Italy.

School of Athens, 1510–11, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Vatican State, Rome, Italy.

Expulsion of Heliодorus, 1511–12, fresco, Stanza d'Eliodoro, Vatican Palace, Vatican State, Rome, Italy.

Baldassare Castiglione, c. 1514–15, oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 26 1/4" (82 x 67 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

Further Reading:

Bruno Santi, *Raphael*.

Pierluigi De Vecchi, *Raphael*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the commercialization of a painting or drawing, as mentioned in connection with the angels in the *Sistine Madonna*, affect your viewing of the work of art as a whole?
2. How does Raphael use movement to drive his paintings? Think of *Galatea* and *Expulsion of Heliодorus*.

Lecture Twenty-Two

The High Renaissance—Michelangelo

Scope: Michelangelo lived a long and productive life, and for this reason, we will limit our focus to the most famous masterpieces of the first half of his career—the *Pietà* in St. Peter's, the *David* in Florence, and the Sistine Chapel ceiling in the Vatican. We will contemplate the unusual composition of the *Pietà*, compare Michelangelo's *David* to Donatello's, and spend some time exploring the magnificent figures and scenes of the Sistine Chapel frescoes.

Outline

- I. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), like Titian, lived into his late 80s, but this artist had a much more radical impact on the art of his time. He did not simply reflect stylistic changes; he decisively affected them. By 1520, he was probably the most influential artist in Europe, and his later work moved farther from the ideals of the Renaissance toward the pessimism and angst characteristic of the middle decades of the 16th century in Italian art.
 - A. Michelangelo was born in the village of Caprese, 40 miles east of Florence. He was apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio, whose Florentine workshop was among the busiest in the city. Later, Michelangelo was invited to live and work in the Medici Palace, where Lorenzo de' Medici had established an informal academy.
 - B. His abilities were quickly demonstrated, and when he was 23, he was commissioned by a French cardinal at the Vatican to design and carve a marble sculpture for his tomb in St. Peter's, the renowned *Pietà*.
- II. The *Pietà* (c. 1498–1499) was moved from its original chapel when the new St. Peter's replaced the old basilica. The *Pietà* attracted attention and respect from the beginning, partially because the subject had not been treated in Italian sculpture before.
 - A. The prototypes for this subject in sculpture are in northern art, such as the wooden Gothic sculpture we saw in Lecture Five (*Pietà*, German, c. 1300). Michelangelo's sculpture belongs to the Italian Renaissance. It is idealized and its grief is controlled, not expressionistic. Still, the concept is northern, and it may have reached Michelangelo through the medium of prints.
 - B. Some considered Michelangelo's *Pietà* blasphemous because there was no support for the scene in the Gospels. During the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, a Catholic writer called the subject "a Lutheran notion."

- C. The youth of the beautiful Virgin Mary, apparently no older than her dead son, was a subject of debate. Michelangelo is said to have explained it by saying that Mary's eternal chastity was demonstrated by the unchanging flower of her youth.
 - D. In the sculpture, the group is supported by an oval base imitating a rock that serves as a seat for the Virgin Mary. Her robe, overlaid by the winding sheet in which Jesus was lowered from the cross, spreads out over the base of the stone in broad folds. From this base, the group is composed in a pyramidal shape culminating at Mary's head.
 - E. The eye follows the ascent on the right with Christ's projecting left leg and the Madonna's extended arm, and on the left, by the curve of the winding sheet, which Mary pulls up to support Christ's shoulder. The curve of his right arm echoes this upward movement and introduces a circular motion that continues through his head and her shoulder.
 - F. The invention of the broad base of drapery, together with the integration of the body into Mary's lap and the rhythms of the cloth, was necessary to convincingly support the large body of Christ.
 - G. His long, smoothly modeled body provides the emotional focus. It is tilted slightly forward in an almost ritual display of the *corpus domini*, the body of the Lord, the symbol of the Christian communion. Above it, the upper robe of the Virgin's torso is arranged in deeply cut broken folds that crystallize her inner emotion. Note the contrast between Christ's limp left hand and the open gesture of Mary's left hand.
 - H. This is the most highly finished and detailed sculpture Michelangelo ever made. It is also the only sculpture he ever signed; the signature is on the sash across Mary's breast.
- III. Our next example is the famous *David* (c. 1501–1504). It would be difficult to imagine a more complete contrast than that between this *David* and Donatello's bronze *David*. Not only the medium differs—marble instead of bronze—but Michelangelo's figure is a heroic young man, not a rather epicene boy.
- A. Michelangelo's work is huge when compared with Donatello's, measuring 16 ½ feet tall without the base. Michelangelo was reworking a block of marble that another sculptor had begun to carve. The figure was originally intended to be placed on one of the buttresses of the Cathedral of Florence, so it would have had to have been huge to be seen from the ground. It is not clear whether a buttress was still the intended position when Michelangelo took over the task of completing the statue, but by the time he finished, there was no thought of placing it there.
 - B. Michelangelo's achievement, not only in successfully working from an inadequately thick block of stone that had already been abandoned, but in creating a potent image of a biblical hero, was instantly

acknowledged. The cathedral authorities assembled a commission of prominent artists to decide where the *David* should be placed. They selected a spot beside the main entrance to the Palazzo della Signoria, the seat of Florentine government. It remained there until 1873, when it was moved to the Academy.

- C. Michelangelo's *David* owes one thing to Donatello's—its nudity. The artist's decision to create nude biblical figures was repeated many times in the Sistine Chapel; thus, it is difficult for us to realize how little precedent it had. Apart from Adam and Eve, nudity in a church setting was uncommon, despite the widespread Renaissance interest in the representation of the naked body. For Michelangelo, the body was the principal means of expression. When nudity was completely inappropriate, he clothed his figures, but even then, he produced such sculptures as a *Risen Christ* without a loincloth.
 - D. As had the sculptors of antiquity, as well as Donatello and other Renaissance predecessors, Michelangelo mastered the easy, asymmetrical balance of the standing figure by making one leg weight-bearing while the other is relaxed. The body has a straight, vertical side, closed, with muscular potential, and David holds a stone in the hand by his side. The other side is open, his left arm raised with the end of the slingshot held in his hand. He also looks left; this is the vulnerable side, but the body is curved like a drawn bowstring.
 - E. The hands and head are oversized, stressing the fundamental qualities of a guardian. Here, David is the civic protector of Florence, and his apparent age and size—at odds with the Old Testament description—have identified him with Hercules in the public mind. A citizen wrote of Michelangelo's *David*, "Just as David defended his people and governed them justly, so those who govern this city should act."
- IV. Our next example shows the Sistine Chapel ceiling (c. 1508–1511, Vatican) in a view of the chapel looking toward the altar wall. The private chapel of the pope, located between the papal apartments and the basilica of St. Peter, it is one of the most sacred places in the Vatican.
- A. The chapel was founded by Pope Sixtus IV. It was built and decorated in a brief span of time. It originally consisted of a painted ceiling and a lower group of frescoes painted by a number of artists in 1481–1482.
 - B. The double sequence of scenes on the ceiling shows the *Creation* through the *Expulsion from Eden*, followed by scenes from the life of Noah. The *Expulsion* is directly above the gate that separates the clergy from the laity. On the coved sides, prophets alternate with sibyls, with the ancestors of Christ in the triangular areas and Old Testament scenes in the four corners.
 - C. Although there is the illusion of architecture on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, everything is painted.

- D. The ceiling is famous for a group of figures called the Nudes (*Ignudi*) who frame the scenes at each of the corners.
1. The Nude from the corner above the altar, near the *Separation of Light from Darkness*, appears to have flesh that is real. The medallion is “bronze,” suspended by cloth bands over “marble” architecture, including the seat provided for the Nude and the “frame” of the painting with the *Separation of Light from Darkness*.
 2. This detail also shows the beginning of the second scene—the *Creation of the Sun and the Moon*—in which we see the knees of God.
 3. There is no general agreement on whether the Nudes carry specific meaning. They have been called “Christian athletes,” yet they are so striking that one hesitates to deny them meaning.
 4. The Nudes derive from the *Belvedere Torso*, a Hellenistic sculpture from 50 B.C. in the Vatican collection. This served Michelangelo as a theme, and all the Nudes are variations of that theme. The ancient sculpture group of the *Laocoön* was also an influence.
- E. Figures of the prophets and sibyls flank the main scenes from Genesis. These figures are much larger than the Nudes, but they are also painted as if they were real figures, with natural flesh colors and modeled in three dimensions. They are figures of great significance, hence, the increase in size over the decorative Nudes.
- F. The *Libyan Sibyl* represents the pagan women gifted with prophetic powers, whose writings were thought to have foretold the coming of Christ.
1. Her body spirals as she turns, pirouetting on her toes so that her legs and hips are parallel to the picture plane, while her torso and arms continue the rotation into the space behind her. She deposits the book of her writings, while her head remains in profile. Her gaze is toward the papal altar on the floor below.
 2. Note the width, like a wingspread, of her book. The figure rises from a narrow base to a broad cap, and this shape, combined with her spiral, results in an inversion of the Renaissance pyramid.
- G. Jeremiah is a significant figure among the prophets and sibyls. He wrote that oppression and suffering must precede salvation. His body droops under the weight of his sorrow, the destruction of Jerusalem.
1. Michelangelo depicts one side of Jeremiah’s body in shadow, while the other side is darkly outlined. The bulk of his body and the fall of his beard pull him downward, while his legs, crossed at the ankles, deprive him of support.
 2. This scene is placed directly above the papal throne. Jeremiah’s sorrow is the pope’s sorrow, and viewed against the contemporary

background of the continuing attempt to drive the French from Italy, it had special relevance.

- H. Michelangelo drew on the book of Genesis to portray the *Creation of Adam*.
1. God, surrounded by angels and a great cloak, enters from the right. The force of the wind is seen in the drapery and his hair. He extends his right arm, and his forefinger approaches another. Adam lies on a barren Earth, his body completely within the contour of the sloping ground except for his left forearm with its drooping hand and forefinger.
 2. There is no energy in Adam. The line of his leg and torso is still bound to Earth, his torso hardly supported by his right arm. His head does have a spark of life; his gaze is locked with God’s, and that force pulls his head forward from his torpid body.
 3. The distance between God’s fingertip and Adam’s is very short yet visible from the floor of the chapel. It is possible to follow the life force as it moves from the fingertip through the arm to Adam’s head.
- I. Michelangelo worked from the entrance of the chapel toward the altar, so the last of the Genesis scenes that he painted was the *Separation from Light from Darkness*.
1. In the void, the partial figure of God is seen revolving in space. The painted area is one of the small ones; God is cropped at the knees, but Michelangelo makes a virtue of this limitation by emphasizing the maker’s hands physically pushing matter, that is, “light” and “dark,” apart.
 2. Consider that this initial act of creation is directly above the altar, and on the altar wall just below the *Separation of Light and Darkness* is Jonah. This prophet’s experience of three days in the belly of a whale before he was cast out was understood as an Old Testament parallel to the entombment and resurrection of Christ.
- J. Creation, death, resurrection, and salvation through the sacrifice of Christ—these themes have never been more powerfully combined in the history of Christian art.

Works Discussed:

Michelangelo:

Pietà, 1498–99, marble, 5' 8 ½" H (173.9 cm H), Basilica of St. Peter’s, Rome, Italy.

David, 1501–04, marble, 13' 5" H (480 cm H), Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence, Italy.

Ignudo, Libyan Sibyl, Prophet Jeremiah, Creation of Adam, Separation of Light from Darkness, Jonah, 1508–11, fresco, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, Vatican Palace, Vatican State, Rome, Italy.

Further Reading:

William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture, Painting, Architecture*.

Ross King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How is Michelangelo's *Pietà* different from other works of the same subject?
2. How does the double sequence of scenes in the Sistine Chapel affect the viewer? Think about the perspective that Michelangelo offered with this arrangement.

Lecture Twenty-Three

Albrecht Dürer and German Renaissance Art

Scope: After concentrating on the Italian High Renaissance masters, we now turn our attention once again to northern Europe. We leave the formal idealism of the Renaissance and return to a culture rooted in Naturalism. First, we will look briefly at an engraving by Martin Schongauer before focusing on Albrecht Dürer's art. In particular, we will look at Dürer's influences and his original blend of Renaissance and northern European artistic characteristics. Throughout the lecture, we will discuss the development, process, and artistic results of printmaking.

Outline

- I. Returning to northern Europe in this lecture, we will study several German artists, particularly Albrecht Dürer, a High Renaissance artist who absorbed Italian Renaissance art and fused it with northern forms in an original manner.
- II. We will also study printmaking, principally woodcuts and engravings. *Incunabula*, Latin for "cradle," refers to the earliest prints made. This medium, whose origins are closely associated with northern European art near the end of the 14th century, also has a history in the East. Centuries earlier, the Chinese invented paper and, later, began to print books and pictures from carved wood blocks. When the techniques were introduced into the West, printing technology in 15th-century Europe developed rapidly.
 - A. The earliest prints were often single images, such as playing cards or representations of saints. When movable type was invented, woodblock illustrations were incorporated into books.
 - B. As printing methods were improved and multiplied, the potential for the production and sale of artist-designed prints became clear.
- III. An older contemporary of Dürer, Martin Schongauer (1450–1491) worked in Colmar in Germany. His paintings are rare, but he left 115 engravings that influenced the development of northern printmaking. Schongauer started his career as a goldsmith, and the engraving technique evolved from goldsmiths.
 - A. In engraving, a design is created in V-shaped grooves cut into a soft metal plate, usually copper, with a steel tool called a *burin*. Ink was then spread over the surface of the copper plate and wiped off, leaving ink only in the grooves. A sheet of moistened paper was placed on the plate and run through a press, forcing the paper into the grooves, drawing out the ink, and reproducing the design on the paper in reverse.

- B. The advantage of printmaking is that multiple images can be produced from a single plate or block. As long as the printing is done or supervised by the artist to control the quality of each print, the prints are considered to be multiple originals.
 - C. Our example is Schongauer's *Temptation of St. Anthony* (c. 1480s). This subject is taken from the *Golden Legend*, the story of St. Anthony besieged by monsters and seductive women. After surviving one attack of demons, he "challenged the demons to renew the combat. They appeared in the forms of various wild beasts and tore at his flesh cruelly with their teeth, horns, and claws."
 - 1. In the engraving, nine creatures assail the saint. Schongauer's most original idea was to place the scene in mid-air, with St. Anthony in the middle of a violent fray of demons. The *Golden Legend* speaks of wild beasts, but Schongauer also uses insect forms, often with human arms and legs terminating in claws.
 - 2. The figures are simultaneously violent and decorative, and the whole design is a sort of hieroglyph of patient suffering. Schongauer's technique is detailed and varied. In addition to parallel lines, he introduces cross-hatching in his modeling, which produces richer shadows.
 - 3. The engraving was said to have been so admired by Michelangelo that he made a copy of it.
- IV. Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) was born in Nuremberg, the son of a goldsmith, from whom he received his earliest training. Later, he studied with Michael Wolgemut, a painter who ran a large workshop that produced woodcut book illustrations.
- A. At 18, Dürer traveled throughout Germany with the ultimate goal of working with Schongauer, but he arrived a month after the master's death. Dürer stayed in Germany for two years, returned to Nuremberg in 1494, and married. Later that year, he traveled to Venice, the first of his two visits to Italy. As a printmaker, Dürer began his career as a designer of woodcuts. Many scholars believe that Dürer cut some of the early blocks for his prints, although the actual cutting of blocks was usually done by specialized craftsmen working from the artist's design.
 - B. Woodcuts preceded engravings as a print medium. The technique is laborious because the design is first drawn and then must be cut away wherever no line has been made. The design is on the raised surface left after the woodcutter has cut away everything else. The wood block had to be soft enough to cut but hard enough that the ridges would not break in printing; thus, a solid wood plank was used for strength.
 - C. Our example shows Dürer's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (c. 1498). This woodcut reveals hundreds of fine lines—far more lines than

open white spaces. Note the thinness of the lines from the raised ridges of wood.

- 1. The subject came from the Book of Revelation. From the right, the apocalyptic horsemen are Invasion with his bow, Civil Strife with the sword, Famine with the scales, and Death on the Pale Horse. The passage in Revelation concludes, "And power was given unto them...to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."
 - 2. This passage, from the last and one of the most powerful books of the New Testament, received its most famous visualization in Dürer's woodcut. Note his monogram at the bottom center.
 - 3. The expressive characteristics of woodcuts appealed to Dürer, but he also produced some supreme examples in engraving.
- V. Our next image shows an engraving, *Adam and Eve (Fall of Man)* (c. 1504, signed and dated in full on plaque).
- A. The nude figures are evidence of Dürer's interest in Italian art, but they are placed in front of dense woods studied with the probing eye of a northern Naturalist. Note the animals at the feet of the first couple. The compelling rendition of surface textures and the poses of these animals are delightful.
 - B. Adam grasps the tree of life, and Eve takes the fruit from the serpent, but already she holds a fruit in her other hand from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
 - C. Looking for an ideal type of beauty, Dürer studied drawings or prints of famous Classical sculpture. He found a model for Adam in the *Apollo Belvedere*. Adam's pose is the reverse of the *Apollo* because of the reverse nature of printmaking.
- VI. The engraving *St. Jerome in His Study* (c. 1514) is one of the most admired prints ever produced, for the expressive power of the saint engaged in his work and for Dürer's creation of an interior space glowing with direct and reflected light.
- A. Jerome is writing, and his halo glows as a natural part of him, radiating sanctity and intellect.
 - B. Symbols abound among the household objects: the skull, which represents the brevity and vanity of human life; the lion, from whose paw Jerome removed a thorn; a crucifix on the desk; an hourglass in the corner; and Jerome's papers and scissors in their wall rack near the rosary.
 - C. This space was created with Renaissance perspective and control of light, which allowed Dürer to subsume the details into a comprehensive whole.

VII. Our next work is one of Dürer's paintings, *Self-Portrait* (c. 1500).

- A. The date marks the half-millennium. In this holy year, Dürer painted himself in a frontal and symmetrical pose, the vertical of the center line emphasized by the balanced fall of his long hair and fixed gaze.
- B. The pose is in the attitude of Jesus Christ, inspired by the devotional ideal of *Imitatio Christi* ("Imitation of Christ") from a book attributed to the 15th-century German monk Thomas á Kempis. Dürer's imitation extends to idealizing his own features and the placement of his right hand in the position of the *Salvator Mundi* ("Savior of the World"). Because this imitation of Christ was understood to mean more than simple imitation of the good works and example of Christ's life, it could be illustrated literally without blasphemy.
- C. The Latin inscription at right is translated "Thus I painted myself, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg, using lasting colors, at the age of 28." He signed it with his monogram and the date at left.

VIII. Another painting is the *All Saints Altarpiece* (*Adoration of the Holy Trinity*) (c. 1511), which was acquired by Rudolf II in Prague in 1585.

- A. The Trinity is at the top, with the dove of the Holy Spirit above the crowned head of God. God's arms are outstretched in a gesture that supports the cross from which Christ's body hangs.
- B. Christ is adored on the left by the Virgin Mary and other female saints and, on the right, by St. John the Baptist, who is accompanied by Old Testament figures, including Moses and David.
- C. The lower-tier figures, despite being in the clouds, are not saints. Some are contemporaries, including members of the Landauer family, who commissioned the painting. The altarpiece was intended for a chapel in a Nuremberg home for elderly and poor men called the Twelve Brothers' House, a name referring to the apostles. Other figures in the lower tier include two popes, two emperors, and the elderly Matthäus Landauer at the left.
- D. A landscape with a central lake and shores is below. In the right corner, Dürer holds a tablet with his signature and the date.
- E. This painting combines northern and Italian aspects. It is a devotional altarpiece with detail and portraits in the style of northern Realism, and it appears above a German landscape, but it is Italian High Renaissance in its composition.

IX. Dürer was a Christian Humanist, like his great Italian contemporaries, but he was also a German affected by the Protestant Reformation. A steadfast follower of Martin Luther, he nonetheless had absorbed the Catholicism of his birth and the Italian Renaissance language in which some of its greatest art had been expressed. Thus, the paintings of the *Four Apostles* owe their physical power and palpable intelligence to Italy.

- A. The *Four Apostles* (c. 1526) depicts St. John, with a red robe, and St. Paul announcing their lineage. Paul belongs to a long line of Italian Renaissance figures, from Giotto to Masaccio to Piero to Michelangelo, whether or not he is directly indebted to any of them.
- B. The title is not accurate because one of the four, St. Mark, was not an apostle but an evangelist. The paintings were known as the *Four Apostles* beginning shortly after Dürer's death.
- C. The figures, painted on two panels, are larger than life-size. Each panel contains two figures, but in each, one of the pair greatly dominates the other.
 - 1. On the left panel, St. John the Evangelist mostly fills the composition, reading the opening words from his own Gospel. St. Peter stands behind him, holding the key, his attribute. This attitude seems out of character for the short-tempered Peter and may be intended to emphasize the role denoted by his name, the rock of the Church.
 - 2. On the right panel, St. Paul, identified by his sword, dominates the scene. He alone among the apostles looks at the viewer. Behind him is St. Mark, identified by a scroll in his hand.
- D. This is Dürer's last great achievement in painting. He considered the paintings to be his artistic testament, and he gave them to Nuremberg, which had become a Reformation city in 1525. Dürer presented them in remembrance of himself. They should not be considered Reformation paintings or anti-Catholic paintings.
- E. The inscriptions at the bottom of the pictures are directed against false prophets and deniers of Christ. These apparently included the extreme forces of the Reformation who, in Dürer's view, threatened the success of the Reformation and the foundations of Christian belief. Dürer was a conservative Reformer, and he seems to have intended these four "apostles" as a warning, as witnesses of the true word of the Bible.

Works Discussed:

Martin Schongauer:

Temptation of St. Anthony, 1480s, engraving, 12 ¼ x 9" (30.48 x 22.86 cm), Fondazione Magnani-Rocca, Parma, Italy.

Albrecht Dürer:

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, 1498, woodcut, 15 ½ x 11" (38.1 x 27.94 cm), British Museum, London, Great Britain.

Adam and Eve (Fall of Man), 1504, engraving, 9 ¾ x 7 ½" (22.86 x 17.78 cm), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain.

St. Jerome in His Study, 1514, engraving, 9 ½ x 7 ¼" (22.86 x 17.78 cm), Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany.

Self-Portrait, 1500, oil on panel, 26 ½ x 19 ¼" (67 x 49 cm), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

All Saints Altarpiece (Adoration of the Holy Trinity), 1511, oil on panel, 53 ¼ x 48 ½" (135 x 123.4 cm), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Four Apostles, 1526, oil on panel, 7' 1" x 2' 6" (2.16 x .76 m), Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

Further Reading:

Daniel De Simone, ed., *A Heavenly Craft: The Woodcut in Early Printed Books*.

Giulia Bartrum, Gunter Grass (contributor), Joseph L. Koerner (contributor), and Ute Kuhlemann (contributor), *Albrecht Dürer and His Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the inherent advantages of woodcuts and engravings as media? What originality is possible through these media?
2. Differentiate between Renaissance and northern elements in Dürer's work.

Lecture Twenty-Four

Riemenschneider and Grünewald

Scope: In this lecture, we will explore the work of two more German artists, Tilman Riemenschneider and Matthias Grünewald. Contemplating altarpieces by these artists, we will discover their different styles and depictions of sacred subjects. We will look at Riemenschneider's *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood* and Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*.

Outline

- I. The two artists discussed in this lecture might seem retrogressive because the style of their work is not like that of the Renaissance-oriented Dürer. They both have strong ties to the late-medieval traditions of northern Europe. However, Riemenschneider displayed a compelling Humanism and emotional directness in his work, while Grünewald, a contemporary of Dürer's and an artist aware of Renaissance ideals, chose another path.
- II. Tilman Riemenschneider (1460–1531) worked principally in Würzburg as a sculptor in wood and stone. He never traveled widely, although his work occasionally seems to reveal the influence of the south.
 - A. Our first example shows Riemenschneider's *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood* (c. 1501–1505, Church of St. Jacob's, Rothenburg). The shrine stands about 29 ½ feet high in Rothenburg, an imperial city near the Rhine ("imperial" here refers to the Roman Empire).
 1. There was a long tradition of wood carving in the north, and Riemenschneider was one of the last great sculptors in wood. He did not gild or paint his work, which may have been a response to the growing resistance in Germanic countries to what was regarded as idolatry, especially in religious sculpture.
 2. The relic of Christ's blood, which gives this altarpiece its name, is contained in a vial or crystal embedded in a cross that is supported by two angels in the section of the altar just above the main scene of the *Last Supper*. This group of angels is flanked by larger figures of the *Annunciation*. This scene is unusual because Mary is on the left and the Archangel Gabriel is on the right, a reversal of the traditional placement.
 - B. The altarpiece consists of a centerpiece and two wings. The wings have scenes carved in relief.
 1. On the left wing is the *Entry into Jerusalem*, with a crowd of heads represented while Christ rides into the city. Christ is passing closely through the narrow city gate; a portcullis at the top of the gate with pointed stakes threatens Christ's head.

2. The right wing shows the scene on Gethsemane, the *Agony in the Garden*. The rocky landscape is suggested, and the sleeping apostles are clearly distinguished. St. Peter's right hand rests on the hilt of his knife, with which he will attack the servant of the high priest. In the right background, Judas leads a group of soldiers through another gate.
- C. These two scenes flank the *Last Supper*. This scene is placed on a shallow stage, the figures underneath a canopy of elaborate late-Gothic carvings of vines and leaves—an example of the high estimation the northern European artist placed on the natural world.
1. The upper room of the *Last Supper* has miniature windows in the background. These mullioned windows are glazed with bull's-eye leaded glass, which allows light from the chapel window to illuminate the space from behind, while light from the church illuminates the front of the figures.
 2. In a particularly original interpretation, Judas is in the center of the group, standing and confronting Christ. This confrontation, according to the Gospel of St. John, ended when Jesus said to Judas, "That which thou doest, do quickly," and Judas "went immediately out; and it was night." The wooden sculpture of Judas can be physically removed, which shifts the scene to the next moment when Jesus says, "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."
- III. We are uncertain about the proper name of Matthias Grünewald and almost everything else connected with him. Grünewald (also known as Neithart or Master Mathis) may have been born about the same time as Dürer, and they both died in 1528. His greatest achievement—the altar from Isenheim—is one of the masterpieces of German art. It is also in complete contrast with the art of Dürer.
- A. The *Isenheim Altarpiece* is located in Colmar, France, in the Unterlinden Museum, which is housed in a 13th-century former Dominican convent. The altarpiece was made for a religious settlement and hospital at Isenheim devoted to St. Anthony. It consists of paintings by Grünewald and a group of sculptures by Niklaus Hagenauer done in 1490, 20 years before Grünewald assumed completion of the altarpiece.
 - B. In the early 20th century, Joris-Karl Huysmans, author of *Au rebours* ("Against the Grain") and art critic, wrote of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, "...it looms up the moment you venture in, stunning you with its horrific nightmare of Calvary. It is as if a whirlwind of art has been let loose, and you need a few minutes to recover, to get over the impression of pitiful horror evoked by that huge crucified Christ..."

- C. In the Colmar museum, the altarpiece has never been displayed as it must have been at Isenheim. When it was taken from Isenheim in the late 18th century, the panels and sculptures were removed, leaving behind the heavier structural parts of the altarpiece, including its superstructure. The 1860 museum catalogue notes, "two wagonloads of painted and gilded sculptures had already been taken off many years before to some neighboring area to be sold." A new framework was made in 1930. The panels were mounted separately with all paintings permanently visible. The *Crucifixion*, two saints, and the *Lamentation* are still seen first.

IV. Our example shows the closed view of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* with the *Crucifixion* in the center, flanked by saints on either side and the predella with the *Lamentation* (c. 1515).

- A. The hospital at Isenheim adjoined the convent church, and the altar in the choir could be seen through an opening from the hospital and from the nave through the opening in the rood screen, although only the *Crucifixion* would have been visible.
- B. In the museum today, St. Sebastian and St. Anthony are reversed, placed on the wrong sides. The example shows a photographically reconstructed view so that St. Anthony is on the left side and St. Sebastian is on the right side, as they originally were. Grünewald designed the saints to imitate painted sculpture, a conceit also found in earlier Netherlandish painting.
- C. The central panel, the *Crucifixion*, shows St. John the Evangelist at left with the two Marys—the Madonna in the white robe and St. Mary Magdalene—at his feet. The white robe may allude to the Virgin's purity, or it may be an artistic effort to unify the color scheme of the closed altarpiece, which is red, white, and black.
 1. The Madonna wrings her hands, and the Magdalene stretches her hands up in grief and prayer. The painting is dated 1515 on the ointment jar near the Magdalene. Christ's head inclines toward the side of the scene with his mother.
 2. On the other side is St. John the Baptist and the Lamb. John the Baptist was not present at the Crucifixion; thus, this is not the historical narrative but a symbolic scene in which the forerunner points to Christ's body with a forefinger. With St. John the Baptist is the inscription from the Gospel of St. John (3:30), "He must increase, but I must decrease."
 3. The Lamb is representative of John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." The Lamb holds the reed cross and bleeds into the chalice. The Lamb is a link between the Old Testament and the New Testament, not a historical narrative but a symbolic link.

4. Christ's body shows the disfiguring wounds and the flesh color. The hospital at Isenheim was for patients suffering from *ergotism*, a disease caused by ergot or rye fungus, which was a serious affliction in the Middle Ages. Symptoms included inflated bellies and gangrenous limbs.
 5. Christ's feet may be an illustration of the words of the contemporary mystic Bridget of Sweden, "His feet were curled round the nails as round door hinges toward the other side." Apropos of the gesture of the Baptist, Bridget wrote, "Thou art the Lamb that John pointed out with his finger."
- D. The predella shows St. Mary Magdalene at left, the Madonna, and St. John on the right supporting Christ's body.
- V. Our next example shows a pictorial reconstruction of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* open to the first interior sequence. It depicts the *Annunciation* on the left, a *Concert of Angels* at center left, the *Nativity* at center right, and the *Resurrection* to the right.
- A. The left wing shows the *Annunciation*. Huysmans wrote that the Madonna appeared as "a good solid German woman fed on salted provisions and bloated with beer."
 - B. In the *Concert of Angels*, there is an angel with a large viol, a smaller viol-playing angel under the canopy, a demonic figure at left, prophets at the tops of the colonnettes, and a woman bathed in an aureole of light. Angels dance above the woman's head; she could be the pregnant Madonna or a mystical vision.
 - C. Bridging the space between the *Concert of Angels* and the *Nativity* are several still-life objects, including a crystal pitcher, a tub, and a ceramic pot.
 - D. In the *Nativity*, the Madonna and Child are in the foreground, and in the background is the annunciation to the shepherds. Roses and architecture are behind the Madonna and Child, who are in a closed garden. The Madonna and Child are hieratically large figures.
 - E. About the *Resurrection* scene, Huysmans wrote, "Christ, completely transfigured, rises aloft in smiling majesty; and one is tempted to regard the enormous halo which encircles him, shining brilliantly in the starry night like that star of the Magi...the morning star returning...at night: as the Christmas star grown larger since its birth in the sky, like the Messiah's body since his Nativity on earth."
 1. The physical force of Christ's resurrection sends the soldiers tumbling.
 2. There is an explosion of color, like a Sun, which could refer to the connection between Christ and Apollo, the Sun god.

VI. We now look at a pictorial reconstruction of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* open to the second interior sequence. There are two paintings flanking the preexisting sculpture by Hagenauer. At left is the *Meeting of Paul and Anthony in the Desert*, three sculptured saints are in the center, and the *Temptation of St. Anthony* is at the right.

- A. The *Meeting of Paul and Anthony in the Desert* is a story from the *Golden Legend*. Anthony, believing that he was the first hermit, traveled to the wilderness, but he found St. Paul already there. This passage depicts the two in a convincing wilderness as a raven brings them bread.
- B. Niklaus Hagenauer's sculpture depicts Sts. Augustine, Anthony, and Jerome. St. Augustine is shown with the donor at left, St. Anthony is enthroned at center, and St. Jerome is pictured at right.
- C. The sculptured predella, by an unknown artist, shows Christ and the apostles.
- D. The *Temptation of St. Anthony* shows a bloated man with boils, which may represent suffering from St. Anthony's fire, the "burning sickness," or *erysipelas*, a local febrile disease accompanied by inflammation of the skin, burning, and gangrene of the extremities.
 1. The violence of the demons makes Anthony's fear and pain palpable. The paper at the lower right has Anthony's plea for God's help, "Where are you, good Jesus, why were you not here to heal my wounds?" This may have been a representation of the sufferers' pleas in the hospital at Isenheim.
 2. The cool Alpine mountains in the background are barren yet a relief from the demons' torment.

Works Discussed:

Tilman Riemenschneider:

Altarpiece of the Holy Blood and details: *Entry into Jerusalem*, *Agony in the Garden*, *Last Supper*, c. 1501–1505, lindenwood, 29' 6" H (9 m H), Church of St. Jacob, Rothenburg, Germany.

Matthias Grünewald:

Isenheim Altarpiece, c. 1510–15, oil on panel, closed: 8 x 10' (2.43 x 3 m), Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France.

Niklaus Hagenauer:

Saints Augustine, Anthony, and Jerome from *Isenheim Altarpiece*, c. 1490, polychromed wood, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France.

Further Reading:

Julien Chapuis, *Tilman Riemenschneider*, c. 1460–1531.

Horst Ziermann, *Matthias Grünewald*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Compare Tilman Riemenschneider's *Last Supper* on the *Altarpiece of the Holy Blood* with others we have examined in the course.
2. Name three ways in which the art of Grünewald and Dürer differ. Cite specific examples.

Glossary

Aerial perspective: The effect of deep space in a landscape painting, created by diminution of scale and softened contour lines and by giving a bluish-green tint to the distant hills and other objects. Also called *atmospheric perspective*.

Alla prima (Italian: "at first"): Painting directly on canvas without preparatory drawings.

Altarpiece: A painted or carved artwork placed behind or above the altar in a Christian church.

Annunciation: The announcement of the Incarnation to the Virgin Mary.

Apse: Semicircular or polygonal recess at the end of the long axis (**nave**) of a Christian church.

Aquatint: A method of etching a printing plate to hold tone rather than line.

Arch: A curved structure used as a support over an open space, as in a doorway or bridge.

Baptistery: A separate building or part of a church in which baptism is performed.

Baroque: Derived from the French and Portuguese word *barocco*, meaning an irregularly shaped pearl, this style was highly ornamental and typically involved emotion, drama, and tension. Beginning in Italy and spreading throughout Europe, the Baroque period had its beginnings in the late 16th century and continued into the 18th century.

Basilica: Any church that has a longitudinal **nave**, flanked by colonnaded side aisles, terminating in an **apse**. Originally an ancient Roman public building with the same ground plan.

Book of Hours: Prayer book, often illuminated and containing a calendar.

Burin: A steel tool used in the technique of engraving to make V-shaped grooves into metal plates.

Burr: A ridge of metal ploughed up by the burin during engraving. The metal is left on the plate, where it collects ink that prints as soft, dark areas on the paper.

Campagna (Italian): Countryside around Rome and south to Naples.

Campanile (Italian): A bell tower.

Campo santo (Italian): Literally a holy field, a cemetery.

Cantoria (Italian): Choir gallery or balcony.

Carpet page: Manuscript page with an overall design that resembles a Turkish carpet.

Casting: Technique for producing a work of sculpture in metal.

Cathedral: A church where a bishop has his diocese and official seat (from the Latin *cathedra*, “throne”).

Chancel: The part of the church reserved for the clergy, most often at the east end of the **nave**, beyond the crossing (**transept**).

Chiaroscuro (Italian): “Light-dark,” refers to the dramatic or theatrical contrast of light and dark in painting.

Classical: Term used to refer to the art produced in ancient Greece or Rome, or later art inspired by it.

Clearstory: A row of windows in an outside wall that provides lighting in a church. Also spelled clerestory.

Collage: A composition made of cut and pasted materials.

Constructivism: Artistic movement initiated in Russia that emphasized abstract works inspired by modern machinery.

Counter-Reformation: The reform movement within the Catholic Church brought on by the Protestant Reformation.

Cubism: A movement in modern painting that sought to show multiple views of an object on a flat surface; characterized by fragmented, geometric forms.

Cupola: A small rounded structure (a small dome) traditionally built on top of a church roof.

Dada: A 20th-century movement in art in reaction to World War I that emphasized the illogical and the absurd.

De Stijl (Dutch): Literally, “the style”; an art movement of the early 20th century that emphasized the use of rectangular forms and primary colors and was concerned with the integration of painting and sculpture with architecture and industrial design.

Diptych: An altarpiece consisting of two hinged panels that could be opened and closed.

Doge (Venetian or Genoese dialect): “Duke,” signifying the head of state.

Donor: The person who commissioned a work of art and whose portrait, along with portraits of other family members, may sometimes be included in a composition.

Drypoint: A printmaking technique that involves incising a design into a metal plate using a sharp steel needle; the plate is then inked to create multiple original impressions. Drypoints are characterized by soft, dark blacks due to the absorption of ink by the **Burr**.

Duomo (Italian): Cathedral.

Elevation: An architectural scale drawing showing the side, front, or rear of a building.

Engraving: A printmaking technique that involves cutting a design into a metal plate with a **burin**, then inking and printing the metal plate to create multiple original impressions. The term is also used for the print that results from this process.

Etching: A printmaking technique that involves drawing a design into an acid-resistant ground covering a metal plate. The plate is then bathed in acid, exposing and incising the lines in the metal surface that are unprotected by the ground. Finally, the plate is inked and printed to create multiple original impressions. The term is also used for the print that results from this process.

Eucharist: The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, celebrated in the Mass. Also the bread and wine used in the rite.

Expressionism: Style characterized by distorted and exaggerated shapes and vivid colors; used to convey the emotions aroused in the artist by certain objects or events.

Fauvism: Derived from the French word *fauves*, meaning “wild beasts.” A style of painting in France around 1905 that was characterized by vivid color and intense emotionalism.

Flamboyant Gothic: The last phase of the French Gothic architecture style, which was characterized by S-shaped or flame-shaped curvilinear forms. *Flamma* is Latin for “flame,” and *flambeau* is French for “torch”; from these, the word *flamboyant* was derived.

Flying buttress: A characteristic technique of Gothic architecture; diagonal buttresses supported by exterior arches carry the thrust of the ceiling away from the upper wall to a solid, exterior pier.

Foreshortening: A technique in painting for creating the illusion of three-dimensional objects. Forms appear shortened in relation to the angle from which they are observed.

Fresco (Italian): Literally, “fresh.” The technique of painting in wet plaster on a wall. If the color is painted onto wet plaster it becomes part of the plaster wall and is “true fresco” (*buon fresco*). If it is painted onto the dry surface, it is “dry fresco” (*fresco a secco*). The latter technique is used with expensive pigments or for finishing details.

Frieze: A horizontal architectural band along the upper part of a wall, usually decorated with relief sculpture or painting.

Futurism: Italian style of the early 20th century that emphasized the speed and power of the machine and the vitality of modern life.

Genre: A work of art showing a scene from everyday life.

Gothic: Evolving from the Romanesque style, this architectural style originated in France and spanned a period from the 12th century to the 16th century. The style is characterized by pointed arches, rib vaulting, height, stained-glass windows, and flying buttresses.

Humanism: Associated with the Renaissance and the revival of the freer intellectual spirit of Classical times, this philosophy emphasized the importance of man as an individual. It took hold in Italy in the 15th century and emphasized education, reason, and science in conjunction with theology.

Illumination: A painted decoration in a manuscript.

Illusionism: The use of painting techniques to convince us that we are seeing real three-dimensional forms.

Impressionism: Artistic movement originating in the 1860s in which artists attempted to capture the transient effects of light and used the high-keyed spectrum range of colors. The term was derogatory when coined.

International Gothic: A subset of Gothic art, this style may be seen as a counter-reaction against the severe religiosity that followed the Black Death, as well as a rebirth of courtly late Gothic art. It focused more on observation than symbolism.

Lay figure: An articulated wooden figure that artists use in lieu of a model.

Linear perspective: The mathematical system of creating the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface that was first known in ancient Greece and was redeveloped in the early 15th century in Florence. The architect Filippo Brunelleschi is generally credited with the invention.

Lithography: A method of printmaking invented in 1798 that involves drawing a design on a porous stone or metal plate with a greasy crayon, then fixing the design to the stone and washing, inking, and printing the stone to create multiple original impressions. The term is also used for the print that results from this process.

Maestà (Italian: Majesty): Refers to certain large representations of the Madonna and Christ Child.

Mannerism: Derived from the Italian phrase *maniera della antica*, meaning "manner of the antique." This style predominated in Italy and was widespread throughout Europe from the end of the Renaissance to the beginning of the Baroque period. It was characterized by distortions of space, form, and color.

Mass: The celebration of the Eucharist, in reference to the sacrifice of Christ. The central rite of the Christian liturgy.

Medium: The material or technique in which an artist works.

Modeling: Technique used to produce the illusion of three dimensions in painting by changing colors, adding shadows, and so on.

Naturalism: A stylistic approach, found in many eras, that emphasized capturing the precisely detailed image of an object. Not the same as **Realism**.

Nave: Central aisle of a church, extending from the entrance to the chancel.

Neoclassicism: Artistic style of the late 18th and early 19th century inspired by the Enlightenment and the art of Classical antiquity.

Neo-Plasticism: An alternative term for *de Stijl*, with an emphasis on using rectangular forms and primary colors.

Neo-Platonism: A system that attempted to reconcile the ancient philosophy of Plato and Plotinus with the teachings of Christianity. Developed in Alexandria and other Greek centers in the 3rd century A.D. and revived in the Italian Renaissance.

Oil: Describes the medium in which pigments are suspended in a drying medium, such as linseed or walnut oil. Because the medium does not dry rapidly (as tempera does), it can be applied freely over a wide area, and because the colors are translucent rather than opaque, they create effects of depth and luminosity. When dry, oils are solid films. The Renaissance development of the oil medium can be traced to the Netherlands in the early 15th century, and it became the dominant medium from the 16th century onward.

Passion: The sufferings of Christ from the Last Supper through the Crucifixion; in art, may be used to include post-Crucifixion events.

Perspective: See **linear perspective** and **aerial perspective**.

Pietà (Italian: Pity): The name given to a representation of the dead Christ supported by the Virgin Mary.

Plein air (French): "Open air"; refers to painting out-of-doors, as opposed to studio painting.

Pointillism: The technique of applying tiny brushstrokes of paint to an entire work, developed by Seurat in the 1880s.

Polyptych: An altarpiece or other devotional picture or relief sculpture, made up of multiple panels. Typically, a central panel flanked by wings and surmounted by gables or other forms and sometimes accompanied by smaller panels (the *predella*) below the main panels.

Predella (Italian): The lower part of a large altarpiece, decorated with small paintings relating to the figures above.

Quatrefoil (French): A decorative shape similar to a four-leaf clover, common in Gothic art as a field for relief sculpture or painting.

Realism: The fidelity to natural appearance in painting, found in many periods of art. In the mid-19th century, it was a movement in which artists abandoned Neoclassicism and Romanticism in favor of depicting subjects from the everyday contemporary world, sometimes with a political or social message.

Reformation: A 16th-century religious movement that sought to reform the Catholic Church and resulted in the establishment of Protestant churches.

Relief: The projection of a figure or design from the background on which it is carved, molded, or stamped.

Renaissance: Derived from the Italian word *rinascimento*, meaning “rebirth” or “revival.” Originating in Italy, this period from the late 14th century through the 16th century was characterized by a rebirth of interest in ancient Rome and Classical literature and emphasized art, culture, and learning.

Rococo: An 18th-century style characterized by pastel colors, lively brushwork, and the choice of light, exotic, often erotic, subjects. The term is derived from *rocaille*, a word referring to decorative rock work, as in gardens or parks.

Romanesque: An architectural style developed in France in the 11th century. The style is based on ancient Roman architecture and is typically massive, with round arches, heavy walls, and barrel vaults.

Romanticism: A late 18th- and early 19th-century art style that focused on subjects of intense emotional importance to the artist and emphasized the depiction of nature in its untamed state.

Sarcophagus: A large stone coffin.

Stanza (Italian): Room.

Surrealism: From the French meaning “super-reality.” A 20th-century art movement based upon the unconscious and depicting irrational, dream-like, or fantastic images.

Tempera: A water-based painting medium in which ground colors are usually suspended in egg yolk. The principal medium before the late 15th century in Europe, it is characterized by a gleaming surface, decorative flatness, and durability. Sometimes used in conjunction with oil paints.

Transept: The short axis, or cross arm, of a church. It intersects the **nave** just before the chancel. The ground plan of such a church is cross-shaped.

Triptych: An altarpiece or other devotional image made up of three painted or carved panels. The wings are smaller than the center panel and are sometimes hinged for closing.

Trompe l’oeil (French): Literally, “trick the eye”; a style of painting that is intended to deceive the viewer’s perception of three-dimensionality. See **Illusionism**.

Tympanum: The area between the lintel of the doorway and the arch above it. It may be decorated with sculpture or painting.

Woodcut: The earliest printmaking technique in Europe, involving producing a design on a block of wood by cutting away everything but the raised design, then inking and printing the block to create multiple originals. The term is also used for the print that results from this technique.